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THE FATAL PHRYNE

BY

F. C. PHILIPS,

AUTHOR OF "AS IN A LOOKING-GLASS," ETC.

AND

C. J. WILLS.

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THE FATAL PHRYNE.

BY

F. C. PHILIPS AND C. J. WILLS.

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THE FATAL PHRYNE.

CHAPTER I.

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It was in a fashionable quarter of Paris, and yet it was a most unfashionable house. The architect had given free vent to his imagination in a gigantic and elaborately carved stone *porte-cochère*. It was big enough, ugly enough, and intricate enough for the mansion of a duke, or a newly decorated manufacturer. But from this sublime portal, this almost celestial gate, the artist had sunk to the extreme commonplace; the rest of the house was nothing more or less than the beau ideal of the utilitarian school, all but the big studio which the owner of the place was apt to sarcastically term the fool's paradise. This was particularly hard upon the fool, who had built it out of his own earnings, and left it to Dr. Tholozan, the present proprietor, his brother and only living relative.

Dr. Tholozan was obliged to live in the house, for that was one of the conditions of the legacy; and the doctor, at first very much against the grain, had taken a lodger in the shape of young Mr. Leigh, a very promising artist of the romantic school. Now young Leigh was a great contrast to most of his fellow-workers. Just as the æsthetic set some time ago in this country astonished us by their weird and wild attire, so does this romantic school in the cosmopolitan capital express its sentiments in its clothes. The man whose books nobody reads wears his hair of portentous length, or else clips it so close that he looks like an escaped lunatic. A black or brown velvet coat is *de rigueur* with this class, and as to their hats, they have to be made to order. It is strange that the disciples should differ so much from the master, who is a stout little old gentleman in spectacles.

The painters go a step further: they, too, cling to the velvet coat with fond affection, and, like the convicts recently emancipated, they find a fearful joy in the growth of their hair; it hangs in wild profusion down their backs in a sort of leonine mane. Some of them even curl and oil it, while others rival Aaron himself in the lengths of their beards. Many get themselves up as nineteenth-century Van Dykes or

modern Raphaels, while the stout ones model themselves upon Rubens; most of the military painters riot in big moustachios or waxed imperials, and one and all pass more of their time in the cafés and on the boulevards than before their easels or their modelling boards.

But young Mr. Leigh did none of these things, partly, perhaps, because he was an Englishman; anyhow he was always neat and clean, and he worked so very hard that he had not the time to devote much study to the ornamentation of his own person. So he simply dressed neatly, and took his tub in the morning, and there was nothing peculiar in any way about him. He gave one the idea of a good-looking young fellow who dressed well and enjoyed life. He was not even of heroic stature, for he only stood five feet ten in his stockings; but he was as hard as nails, and he had an honest eye and a clear complexion, though he did spend eight hours a day in the great studio which was once the paradise of the deceased fool, Dr. Tholozan's brother.

Though young Leigh was six-and-twenty he had never been in love. He had not had time for that either,—not that he had lacked opportunities. His models had looked at him in a pensive manner, but all in vain; some of the more sentimental of his female

patrons, who had sat to him for their portraits,—for it was in portraiture that Leigh had scored his first success,—had sighed and simpered at him, and had even asked him to dinner with obvious designs upon his heart; but the sighs and the simpers had been wasted, and Leigh had warily declined the dinners. From portraiture, little by little, Leigh had drifted into the sentimental and the classical. Day by day his canvases had grown larger and larger, and it was the size of his canvases that had caused him to become Dr. Tholozan's lodger, and the occupant of the big studio in the commonplace house with the great doorway.

The doctor's deceased brother had literally covered miles of canvas. Half the modern churches in France, and most of the public buildings, possessed one of his huge masterpieces. He was a man who had earned a large income, a man who had lived upon next to nothing, and who had expended the savings of a lifetime upon the building of the big house and the great studio.

"Once give me elbow-room," the late Monsieur Tholozan had declared, "and I will make Michael Angelo and Rubens look to their laurels." He got his elbow-room, but one still heard a great deal about Michael Angelo and Rubens, and the only

person who ever spoke about the late Monsieur Tholozan was his brother, the doctor.

When Dr. Tholozan inherited his brother's property he tried very hard indeed to find a tenant for the studio. As a studio it was perfection, but the numerous artists who replied to the doctor's advertisements were invariably appalled at its enormous size. But it was this very magnitude that caused young Leigh to close with the doctor at once; it was the very thing he wanted. Of course the studio was lighted by an immense window. At one end was a door, hidden by a great gold-embroidered curtain of pink velvet, which opened into a big semi-circular conservatory filled with tropical plants. There was an immense fire-place in a big recess at the other end, and the great room was carefully heated with concealed hot-water pipes. There were a little ante-room and a small bedroom furnished with Spartan simplicity. Young Leigh and the doctor soon came to terms. Leigh took his meals with his landlord, a bachelor like himself; and the two men were accustomed to spend their evenings together by the fireside in the big studio. In the day they never met. Dr. Tholozan was a lecturer at the Ecole de Médecine. He had many patients and a lucrative hospital appointment, and he wrote a good

deal in the medical journals, being very fond of controversy. These two men's liking was mutual. The artist, after a long day's work, enjoyed his evening's gossip, or a quiet game of *écarté* or backgammon with his landlord; and the doctor was glad to return to what had been his old habit in his brother's lifetime—the habitual chat by the studio fireside.

Leigh and the doctor had inhabited the great house some four years; they always dined together for mutual convenience, and, as has been stated, always adjourned to the studio after dinner. They had played their rubber at backgammon, and were sitting each in his easy-chair on either side of the fire.

"I'm sixty-one to-day," remarked the doctor with a sigh; "I envy you, my friend, you with the world before you, as I had it once. You have the ball at your feet, Leigh, and all you have to do is to go on kicking."

"But you can't complain either, doctor. Everybody has heard of Dr. Tholozan, his reputation is world-wide; while outside the little circle of artists, amateurs, literary men, and dealers I am unknown."

"But you have your friends, Leigh."

"C'est comme ça. I have a crowd of acquaintances if you choose to call them friends."

"And admirers, Leigh—happy man—admirers of both sexes."

The young man blushed a good honest, big blush.

"You're very wide of the mark, doctor. There are a good many well-dressed people who come here in the afternoon to waste their time and mine; they come to look at the pictures merely."

"And at the artist, my friend. The artist has a good deal to do with it."

"Oh, of course I'm part of the show, just like the monkeys in the Jardin des Plantes."

The doctor laughed. "And they manifest their interest in you, my young friend, by sending you truffled turkeys, flowers, and trifles such as this," and the doctor laughingly tapped his fingers upon a magnificent buhl table at his side. "Your friends must admire you very much, Leigh, both as an artist and as a man." And the doctor's lantern jaws expanded with a hyæna-like smile, and he blew a great cloud of smoke into the air.

Again the tell-tale blush mounted into the young Englishman's face.

"The gewgaws you are pleased to exercise your sarcasm upon, my dear doctor, are but the nuts with which they stuff the monkey."

"It's an expensive nut, though, that Madame Pichon has flung to her favourite ape." And again the doctor tapped the table, and grinned diabolically. "You might do worse, Leigh," he continued; "Madame Pichon is still a magnificent animal, and rich *à faire peur.* Yes," he added, as he rubbed his hands together, and deliberately cracked his finger-joints, "you really might do worse. The widow's fortune, my young friend, is undeniable. The late Monsieur Pichon died a millionaire."

"I think I would rather break stones at the roadside than sell myself to a woman I didn't care for. Stone breaking at least is honest, doctor, and has a kind of sordid poetry of its own. An artist, my friend, has no need of a wife, his art is a sufficiently exacting mistress; and, as for you, doctor, you have managed well enough without one."

"When you are sixty-one, my dear Leigh, as I am now, you will probably begin to think seriously of marriage. I believe in Bacon's definition. I need a housekeeper, and shall want a nurse before long. Why shouldn't I combine the two, and sanctify the arrangement by the sacred tie of marriage?"

Young Leigh shrugged his shoulders, and he thought the doctor looked like a very hobgoblin as he put this very unromantic proposition.

"Why not, indeed?" he replied. "It's perhaps a little unromantic; but if that is your ideal wife, why not?"

"Do you think, then, that it would be a prudent step at my age?"

"You are far too wise, doctor, for an inexperienced man like myself to suggest that any act you contemplated would be imprudent."

"You deal in sugared compliments, my friend; Madame Pichon and the rest of them are making quite a man of the world of you. But if I for forty years have been looking for an ideal, why shouldn't I have found her at last in some pleasant-looking woman, say of five-and-thirty, who will look after my wants, forgive my little peculiarities, and preside at the terribly dull dinner which I am accustomed to give once a week—a lady who would be content to smooth my downward path, and then replace me by *her* ideal, who perhaps she may already have her eye upon?"

"Every one to his taste, doctor; you certainly call a spade a spade."

"Possibly in my case, Leigh, age has brought with it humility. Your idea of matrimony is doubtless a higher one. My dear young Abélard, describe to me the Héloïse of your dreams; but moderate

your transports, soften down your raptures in consideration of my poorer and more prosaic nature." The doctor lit a second cigar, and the young man rose to his feet, and commenced to pace the thick Turkey carpet with hurried strides.

"She is as yet but a vision of my dreams. I see her but vaguely, ever changing, as do the pictures in a kaleidoscope, and then I try to realise her, but I am never satisfied with my own work. The pictures that leave my easel are but dreams of fair women, after all; indistinct souvenirs, impossibilities and exaggerations,—monsters that I have pieced and patched together, artistic Frankensteins that I hate as soon as I have finished them. I gaze at them with a sort of horror. Look at the last," he said, with a deprecatory laugh. "Well, I sold it for four thousand francs, and that's the best I can say for it. Israels, the dealer, will sell it for as much again. And when I look at it I hate myself. What is it, after all, but a half-clad simpering impossiblity, a miserable imposture? The lower extremities are Julie Pasdeloup, the arms are bought at five francs an hour of an ugly Breton girl with red hair, the face is but a tricky composition——"

"While the hair is rather a glorious rendering of Madame Pichon's *chevelure,* eh, my young friend?

Madame Pichon must take an extraordinary interest in art, and particularly in the works of young Mr. Leigh, to have let down her magnificent tresses. I suppose *she* sat for love?"

"Or vanity, whichever you please to call it, doctor," answered the artist with a laugh. "Anyhow, the monster is finished," he continued; "it is but a sort of complicated Siamese twin; and to-morrow Israels will come and grin before it, and gloat upon it, and rub his hands, and order another like it, and I shall go on completing the tale of bricks without straw. Another canvas will be strained, and another monster turned out at so much a square foot."

"And young Mr. Leigh will be no nearer his ideal than ever, eh? You should go out into the world, my friend; society would, as you know, receive you with open arms. In society you would have the opportunity of observing the manners and customs of the young, the ingenuous, and the innocent of the opposite sex; why not seek your ideal there?" and the doctor chuckled. "Or have hours spent in the society of Mademoiselle Pasdeloup, and the young lady with the beautiful arms and the red hair, spoilt you for the conventional *ingénue* of everyday life?"

"You're too hard on me, old friend. The Pasdeloup is to me but a pair of well-turned limbs; she interests me socially as little as do the dreadful things you showed me at the Musée Orfila in the glass jars. They are too human, though; like the Pasdeloup, they are but anatomical studies. If I could only find her—this ideal that we all dream of, and look for, as the old Spaniards, ever disappointed and ever hoping on, searched with unfailing energy for the visionary country of El Dorado —if I could only find her, I would clap her at once into the big picture I am meditating for this year's Salon. The sketch is finished to-day."

"And the subject, my enthusiastic young friend, you haven't told me your subject yet?"

"Oh, it's a hackneyed subject enough. Phryne before the Tribunal. It will be my protest against the successful abominations of the day. The Realists are ruining our nineteenth-century taste. Is it not a crying shame," said the young fellow, with enthusiasm in his tone and fire in his eye, "that a crowd five deep should stand in rapture before La Dame au Perroquet, a disgraceful nudity sprawling upon a heap of cushions, the triumph of the gross, the sensuous, and the real? There shall be nothing gross about my Phryne, and yet she shall be beauti-

ful; the figure shall ennoble the subject, and raise it from the depths of the commonplace to the Sublime and Poetical."

"Ah, my poor brother was always striving after the Sublime; he never reached it; he succeeded, though, in attaining the Gigantic. Poor fellow, he used to go into raptures over Gericault's great monstrosity, the Wreck of the *Medusa,* with the lurid lights and ghastly corpses; and he used to chuckle as he told me how Dreux d'Orcy declined to cut it up into four for a paltry profit of twenty thousand francs. He was an enthusiast in his way, a worshipper of the immense. This huge barrack was the result. It has been to me a lasting monument of my poor brother's great ideas. I fear sometimes that you artists, in your search for the ideal, often succeed in discovering only the ridiculous."

There was a pause; the two men smoked on in silence. It was broken at length by Dr. Tholozan.

"You've been fairly comfortable here, Leigh, for the last few years, I trust?"

The artist looked at him inquiringly. "Of course I have, doctor; why do you ask me?"

"Because I am about to take a step which may incommode us both, my young friend. Don't be

surprised, don't be disgusted; above all, don't remonstrate. Within the week I shall probably marry."

"Ah, the pleasant-looking woman of five-and-thirty you've been talking about, doctor; the genial lady, who is to soothe your declining years!"

"It were better, perhaps, if it had been so. I haven't been accepted yet, however. The lady may prefer honourable poverty and the possibilities that always loom in the future of every pretty woman."

"She is pretty, then?"

"Yes, she is more than pretty. She is, I suppose, what you would call beautiful. See if she approaches your ideal, Leigh," and Dr. Tholozan handed a photograph to his friend.

As the artist gazed upon the portrait he gave a start of astonishment.

"You approve of her, my young friend? Hein, she meets with your approbation?"

"She is very lovely, doctor."

"Well, Leigh, you will probably have the opportunity of telling her that yourself." And the candidate for matrimony laughed a little mocking sardonic laugh.

But the young fellow did not reply, he was still intently studying the portrait. And the more he looked at it the more astonished he became.

"You don't congratulate me, Leigh. Oh, don't apologise," he said, as the artist began a muttered excuse. "Frankly, you are rather surprised at my good fortune. Is it not so?"

"I am lost in admiration of the lady's beauty, doctor."

"Meditate on it, then, at your leisure, and keep the photograph. It may be useful to you," added this hateful personage, "from an artistic point of view."

Young Leigh stared at the doctor in astonishment, and indistinctly muttered his thanks; and then his eyes were once more irresistibly drawn back to the portrait, as by a magnetic attraction.

"You think I'm making a fool of myself?" continued the elder man. "Listen to her story. I have educated the original of that portrait from childhood. She is now a woman. To-morrow I shall place before her a simple proposition; if she chooses, I am ready to marry her. Or if it so please her, she can remain where she is as one of the teachers of the school in which she has been educated, and I will add to her slender stipend from my own resources. The child has no real claim on me, and I should be the last man to impose myself upon her from a mistaken feeling of gratitude. She is hardly likely

to find her ideal in me; but she will marry me, Leigh, all the same. Fling a bone to a hungry dog, the animal snaps it up at once. I am the bone—a dry and ugly bone." And the doctor gazed into space, and waited for some answering remark from his companion.

The artist did not reply. He seemed still lost in contemplation of the portrait. Soft, sad, dreamy eyes looked out at him, as though seeking for sympathy. The pose was unstudied and graceful in its artless simplicity. There was a softness, which almost amounted to weakness, in the expressive mouth; and all unconsciously, as he gazed at it, the time slipped by in silence, unbroken save by the loud ticking of the great Louis Quinze clock, and the louder beating of his own heart, a sound which the young fellow almost feared would reach his companion's ears. It may seem ludicrous, but that was the thought which passed through young Leigh's brain.

"I have succeeded in astonishing you, at all events," said Dr. Tholozan. "I sha'n't see you again for a week; then I shall introduce to you my bride, or I shall return a rejected man to receive the consolations of your friendship. You don't wish me luck—that's a bad omen, though gamblers think

otherwise. Well, after all, marriage is a lottery, so perhaps your silence may bring me luck. Who knows? Good-night, my friend, I must retire to try and get a quiet night's rest previous to the detestable journey of to-morrow. I shall be at Banqueroutteville-sur-Mer by noon. I'll write you the lady's decision. Oh, keep the photograph; good-night."

They shook hands, and the doctor went out of the studio whistling a tune—the air was *"Malbrouck s'en va-t'en guerre."*

CHAPTER II.

QUITE disregarding the unities, let us go back for forty-eight hours.

The weather in Paris was hateful. The Boulevardiers had fled; the English and American tourists had arrived in their thousands; the personally-conducted flew about in great *char-à-bancs,* and were dragged to the Morgue with its ghastly terrors, to the highest steeples of all the churches, up the Tower of Saint Jacques, down into the Catacombs, and even into the very sewers themselves,—for the sewers are one of the sights in Paris; and an American would feel that he had been wanting in his duty to his country and himself, if he had missed a single glory of the great and beautiful city, which his fellow-countrymen consider is the outward and visible symbol of heaven itself.

Even the Quartier Latin was deserted, for the long summer holidays had just commenced; and though there was a large contingent who returned to their quarters at night-time, during the day they fled

from the great heat to the pleasures of boating on the river at Auteuil or elsewhere, picnicking and bathing. Your aquatic Parisian is a thing of beauty. He dresses for the part: he wears knee-breeches, butcher boots, a solar topee, a gay sash of gaudy colours wound around his waist, a still gayer one carelessly knotted round his neck, while a striped jersey, of at least three colours, completes his startling costume. And when he returns to town at dusk, triumphant, the Gallic Tom Tug finishes the evening at the Closerie des Lilas or some kindred resort with Wilhelmina arrayed in all the glories of a tumbled but voluminous muslin gown, and the pair dance the *cancan* with untiring energy, till exhausted nature can no more. The artists, too, had gone off in a body in search of the picturesque, and the fashionables were drinking the waters, or disporting themselves at the numerous Bains-de-mer. But young Leigh was still manfully working away in his great studio, which was possibly the coolest place in all Paris, and Madame Pichon was still postponing her annual flight.

Dr. Tholozan had in no way exaggerated when he had stated that the deceased Monsieur Pichon was a millionaire. He had married Mademoiselle Sophie Plon because of her unmistakable good looks;

in fact, he had bartered a very heavy settlement for a magnificent complexion, a pair of brilliant laughing black eyes, and a head of hair reaching the young lady's feet. Nor had he made a bad bargain. These chattels were universally admired whenever he appeared with his young wife. But the old gentleman did not live long to enjoy his triumph. Six months after the wedding Monsieur Pichon had died, and had left every farthing he possessed in the world to his young widow. For the first three months the widow's grief had been something terrible to witness. At the very mention of the name of the late Monsieur Pichon she would burst into tears. She had caused an immense white marble sarcophagus to be erected in one of the best positions in Père la Chaise, regardless of expense. At her desire her cousin Dr. Tholozan had composed a pompous Latin epitaph, which was affixed to the sarcophagus in letters of brass. The widow had gone into the most elaborate mourning, and was a daily attendant at mass; but with the sudden fickleness of female nature she had cast the mourning off because young George Leigh—speaking as an artist, and consequently as an authority—had in a moment of weakness stated that black was unbecoming to her. The very next day Madame Pichon appeared

in the studio—for she naturally passed a good deal of her time at Dr. Tholozan's house, he being, as has been said, her near relative—in a delicious costume of the palest lavender. At that time she was amusing herself by posing for the artist as "Niobe Dissolved in Tears." He had just completed a study of her as "Sigismonda mournfully gazing on the Golden Casket which contained the Heart of her Guiscardo."

"Ah, Monsieur George," she cried, as she burst into the studio of the astonished young man, "don't think hardly of me because I've left off my dreadful black. I've done it as a duty, Monsieur George; one must suffer to be beautiful, and I have done violence to my own feelings purely in the interests of art, and for your sake, dear Monsieur George," she added with a little sigh. "I felt that it was a duty, that your divine inspirations should not be interfered with. *Me voici.* How do I do?" and the radiant vision made a little curtsey.

"Dear Madame Pichon, you are charming, always charming, of course; but upon my word I think you are less like Niobe than ever."

"You don't want me to be always like Niobe, do you, dear Monsieur George?" said the young widow with a little pout, and something sparkled in

her brilliant eyes which might have been a tear-drop, but seemed more like a little look of triumph. "I don't care what you say," she added pettishly, "Niobe could not have gone on weeping for ever."

"Ah, but think of the loss of her twelve children, dear madame."

"Twelve!" cried the lady with horror; "then she couldn't have kept her good looks, and she must have been a most uninteresting person, if not indeed positively indecent. And I don't think it's a very great compliment on your part to choose me as her representative."

"Ah, madame," said the artist apologetically, "to me you have been the living incarnation of disconsolate woe."

"But at all events I can't express woe in my hair, and it's the hair you're going to do to-day, Monsieur George, is it not? How will this do?" she continued, as she dropped languidly into the big chair, flinging herself into the sort of pose which we see in those who are about to be photographed. Madame Pichon was a lady who made the most of her advantages, for she was bent on the conquest of the artist, and she meant to marry him. She had tried every means of making him aware of her personal attractions, but young Leigh had as yet ex-

hibited no sign of making love to her. She had told him how rich, how lonely, and how miserable she was, but all in vain.

"Ah, dear madame," said Leigh, "I couldn't think of wasting your time by asking you to pose for the hair; the charming face is already sufficient for my purpose."

Madame Pichon's foot, which by a severe critic might have been considered a little too much in evidence, beat impatiently at the horribly practical answer she had received from the artist. "And why not, sir, pray?" she asked.

"Well, for one reason, dear madame Pichon, because the hair of Niobe must be dishevelled, and it would be rather too great a tax upon your good nature to ask you to disarrange those lovely tresses."

"Monsieur Leigh, there's nothing I wouldn't do for the sake of art. But you're only sarcastic; you're just like the rest of your sex. Men are always sarcastic and cruel," the young widow added with a little sigh. "What you really mean is that you fancy what you call my 'lovely tresses,' in your cruel mocking way, are not my own. You shall soon be undeceived. There! Monsieur George, and there! and there! and there!" and before the astonished man knew where he was the indignant enthusiast

for art had plucked out every comb and hair-pin, and released a wild profusion of waving chestnut locks.

"It's all my own," cried the lady, who was on her mettle. "And now hear your punishment, sir. I condemn you to arrange it to your liking. There is no sacrifice, I repeat, Monsieur George, that I wouldn't make for the advancement of art."

The young man blushed; there was nothing else for it but obedience. He stepped up on to the stage upon which the lady was seated, and his very fingers trembled as they received little electric shocks as he deftly arranged the luxuriant tresses of the late Monsieur Pichon's widow. Then he took refuge behind his easel, where he remained in retirement for some minutes.

At this interesting moment the artist's landlord and the lady's cousin entered the room.

"Bonjour, Sophie," Dr. Tholozan said with a careless nod, and then he gave a little chuckle. "You're actually taking the bread out of the mouths of the professional models."

"Don't speak to me, Felix. If a single hair were to become disarranged the whole effect might be destroyed. I am Misery personified."

"All Paris knows it," he said. "Yes, the re-

semblance is striking, my dear. You are evidently the original of the 'Lady with the Mane,' the enchantress who smiles upon us, twenty times larger than life, as the advertisement of an American hairwash. Leigh, I congratulate you; in fact, I congratulate you both."

"Felix, I'm ashamed of you," said the lady, "there is no subject sacred enough to be safe from your attempts at wit. I am Niobe, sir," she added severely.

"Oh, very possibly, my dear, anything you like. You may be Medusa, or St. Cecilia, or Venus Anadyomene, or Venus Victrix, for the matter of that. From a professional point of view, I should rather say you look like the Goddess of Health. But I won't interrupt you longer. Good-bye, Niobe. Farewell, Galatea. *Au revoir,* Pygmalion! we shall meet at dinner;" and he discreetly disappeared.

"Now that's exactly like Felix," said the lady; "just as we were getting on so nicely, when we were *so* comfortable," she added, with a sort of purr, "he comes and upsets us both, and makes me move my head, and calls us dreadful names. I've no patience with Felix. What would he think, I wonder, were I to burst into his consulting-room when he was engaged with his patients? You'll have to arrange it all

again, Mr. Leigh," she said coquettishly, and the artist, blushing like a peony, emerged from his temporary concealment.

"Now I know what you want to do," said the lady, "you're dying to smoke. Don't mind me. I'll be bound that were I a model you'd smoke without ceremony. I don't dislike tobacco in the least. Indeed, I am quite used to it, for the late Monsieur Pichon used to smoke from morning till night. Shall you be dreadfully horrified if I tell you a secret? He actually taught me to smoke, and to make my own cigarettes, too, for the matter of that. Let me make you a cigarette. There's nothing I enjoy more than making a cigarette," and Niobe proceeded to fashion with nimble fingers a little white cylinder of Turkish tobacco, for she found the materials ready to her hand on a big oak table that was standing by the easel. She presented it to Leigh with a little artless curtsey, and handed him a lighted vesta, then she dexterously twisted up a second, and coiling herself up in the big chair she proceeded to consume it with evident gusto. "Don't you hate interruptions, Monsieur Leigh?" she said meditatively.

"Every one when in your society, madame, is bound to do so."

"Of course that is what you must say, Monsieur George. I wonder whether you really mean it."

"Sincerity is one of my few virtues, madame; but it has stood in my way a good deal. I can't paint the hideous and the repulsive, for I can't soften it down; in fact, I've become a sort of merciless human camera; and—I paint people as I see them, and not as they would wish to be. I can't gild the gingerbread. I can't glorify. I wish I could. I'm a great deal too sincere, Madame Pichon. Look at this, for instance," and the young fellow dragged out a canvas which had been turned to the wall. It was the grinning portrait of all that is bold and bad that can be conceived in the face of an apparently young and handsome woman. "That," said Leigh, "is Mademoiselle Saint Ventadour of the Palais Royal. She offered me a commission for a portrait of herself as 'Comedy.' She is supposed to be all that is most fascinating, all that is most attractive. In a word, she is the fashion. Whenever the Saint Ventadour plays the house is full. She is a fortune to the photographers. I see nothing attractive in her; to me she is but a grinning cat." Madame Pichon smiled approvingly. "In a moment of weakness I accepted the commission. She came here with her respectable mamma, who took snuff at

intervals of three minutes. Each sitting had its special mischance. At the first one, being arrayed in a cream-coloured satin dress, she had the misfortune to sit down on my carefully prepared palette. But she was a good-natured woman, and she accepted my excuses. During the whole of the second sitting a crowd of the *habitués* of the Palais Royal dropped in one by one, and they stood round her in an admiring semi-circle. The hubbub was something terrific; it reminded me of the *foyer de la danse* of the Grand Opera. It was almost impossible to work, and at last I told her so. She dismissed them, and then she said 'Monsieur Leigh, I have a character to lose, and I don't care to be alone with you even though my dear mother is present.' 'Madame,' said I, for I was angry, 'that is no reason why all your admirers should follow you into my studio.' 'Yours is a large studio, Monsieur Leigh,' she said, with one of her loudest professional laughs, 'for all I know it may be the largest studio in Paris; but let me tell you, that, large as it is, it is incapable of accommodating even a hundredth part of those you are pleased to term my 'admirers,' and then she snapped her fingers in my face."

"It's horrible," said Madame Pichon; "you have my sincere sympathy, poor Monsieur George."

"Oh, that was nothing to what followed. I hadn't allowed her to look at the canvas. At the end of the third sitting she insisted on doing so. There was nothing for it. I turned the easel round, and if ever I saw a woman in a passion I saw one then. At first she didn't utter a word, then she turned deadly pale, she clenched her fists, she stamped her foot. 'Sir,' she cried, in her harsh strident voice—for it was the woman who spoke and not the actress—'I had invited you to idealise me as the Muse of Comedy; you have perpetrated a base, a wicked, and infamous caricature. You have represented me as a'—and here she sobbed bitterly —'a minx, Monsieur Leigh. But I will have my revenge; I'm not so utterly friendless, Monsieur Leigh, as you may suppose. My friends shall write you down; they shall annihilate you, they shall ruin you. Come, mamma, let us leave the studio of this wretch, who does not hesitate to insult a defenceless girl' (she is forty, if she's a day). With one indignant sweep of her hand she knocked down, and smashed into a thousand pieces, a beautiful vase of antique *faïence*. 'Mamma,' she added, 'give your arm to your insulted child,' and then, with her handkerchief pressed to her great painted eyes, she left the place. So you see my sincerity stood in my

way, for I painted her as I saw her. She *is* a minx, at least in my eyes."

"Turn her to the wall again," said the widow, with a pretty shudder, "she frightens me. But your story reminds me of the fact that I haven't seen Niobe yet. Tell me, Monsieur George," and the widow laid her hand pleadingly on the artist's arm, "you haven't made a minx of me?"

It is scarcely probable that young Leigh would have been quite so ready to swing his easel round upon its castors, if the yet unfinished Niobe had not really been a great success. It was indeed charming, and Madame Pichon was delighted, and clapped her hands with almost childish glee. And yet the artist had done his pretty model little more than justice. It was the picture of a pretty woman in tears certainly; but if the Niobe on the canvas was the mother of twelve children she certainly did not look her age. The figure was merely sketched in with charcoal, but the face and hands were elaborately finished. The artist had slightly idealised the young widow from a child of earth with golden hair into a sort of rapturous weeping angel, the big black eyes flashed out at you with a hungry loving look, which certainly very much resembled the glances which young Madame Pichon habitually cast upon

Dr. Tholozan's lodger. He might call her Niobe, or the Peri at the Gate, or by any other romantic epithet. One saw a pretty woman in tears, it is true; but the picture gave you the idea that the tears were not very briny, nor very difficult to dry. In fact, Niobe was so undeniably pretty as to make the picture already almost objectionable to every ordinary female mind.

"And you say you never flatter, Monsieur. Tell me, really, does it please you—my portrait; for it is my portrait? Oh, Monsieur George," cried the widow, as she sprang to her feet, "how can I ever thank you!" and she seized both his hands.

It is a trying position for any man when a young and pretty woman seizes him by both hands, thanks him with effusion, and gazes lovingly into his eyes. Such are not the experiences of ordinary men; but artists are a favoured race. Now if young Leigh had been an ordinary human being, he would have flung himself upon his knees at once, and made Madame Pichon an offer of his hand and heart. Anyhow, he could not have had a better opportunity. Madame Pichon would have been delighted, and Dr. Tholozan would have been perfectly satisfied, Society would have clapped its well-gloved hands in an applauding chorus, and young Leigh's crowd of

Bohemian friends would have slapped him on the back till he was sore, and voted him a "devilish clever fellow." But artists are not as other men are. George Leigh simply held pretty Madame Pichon's two hands in his own, failed to return their enthusiastic pressure, and made a particularly stupid speech. He stared into her face, he gazed into her great dreamy black eyes with no loving look, but merely with a sort of critical admiration, just as the judge at a horse-show might inspect the points of a champion prize-winner. Madame Pichon felt a cold thrill run through her, and a sensation of a ball rising in her throat, when, instead of the declaration she honestly expected, he simply faltered out:

"No, madame, it does not satisfy me, your eyes beat me altogether; if you don't mind giving me another quarter of an hour, I'll try what I can do with the hair."

The wretch's cigarette had not even gone out.

"As you please, Monsieur George," the lady said in a disappointed tone; and as the young man led her to a seat she looked more like Niobe than she had ever looked before.

"Ah," she thought "how terribly unimpressionable are these perfidious islanders, these cold, these icy Englishmen;" and her breast heaved with in-

dignation and pique. And then the artist calmly rearranged—or rather disarranged—once more the abundant tresses of her luxuriant hair, and then he retired again behind the big canvas.

"The wretch," said the widow to herself,—"the cold, unimpassioned, unimpressionable wretch; how different, how very different would have been the conduct under such circumstances of the late Monsieur Pichon." And her thoughts wandered involuntarily to the great marble tomb in the cemetery of Père la Chaise, and two real tears of grief, or mortification, appeared between the long dark lashes that fringed her lovely eyes.

Yes, George Leigh was evidently what the French call "a Joseph"—a heartless, wicked Joseph of the blackest dye.

"I'm afraid I give you a great deal of trouble," said the enamoured widow, after a long pause.

"Trouble, dear madame! No, indeed, you are the most satisfactory of models. As a rule they will talk, and I'm sure you haven't said a word for the last ten minutes. And they generally talk such nonsense,—such particularly bald nonsense, too. Would you mind raising the chin a very little, so that I may try and catch the glint of light upon the hair?"

"Ah," thought Niobe, as she did as she was bid, "it's of his picture he's thinking, and not of me. I verily believe he only thinks of me as a sort of superior lay-figure." And she cast a spiteful glance at the jointed life-size *papier-maché* dummy, which stood ready-draped as Niobe in the corner of the studio. "And what are you going to do with me, Monsieur George, when I'm finished?" she asked with some curiosity.

"Oh, I shall send you to the Salon," said the artist, with calm satisfaction.

"And sell me?" said the widow in a solemn tone.

"Oh, dear me, no," said the artist, as he critically regarded his work. "I sold you long ago. Israels takes all my work."

The widow gave a low sob. But the sob passed all unnoticed by the enthusiast behind the canvas.

There was once more silence.

Here was a piece of heartless ingratitude! Was it for this that pretty Madame Pichon had sat as if she were turned to stone for so many mortal hours, merely that her lovely lineaments should be reproduced by a mercenary foreigner, only to be trafficked away for the unromantic bank-notes of a sordid commercial Jew? No! Flesh and blood could not bear it. And pretty Madame Pichon,

who was unmistakable flesh and blood, rose indignantly to her feet.

"I'm not feeling well, Monsieur Leigh," she said, with tears in her voice. "There are moments when the remembrance of my poor dear Pichon, and the thought of what I have lost, and the thousand-and-one affectionate little solicitudes of that dear departed angel, upset me altogether. You must excuse me now," she added hurriedly, as she carefully rearranged her chestnut tresses before Leigh's big Venetian mirror. They were angry eyes that that mirror reflected!

"I can never sufficiently express my gratitude, dear madame," said the artist.

"Don't speak to me, Monsieur Leigh," she exclaimed, with an impatient gesture waving him off, "my heart is too full." And so saying the irate widow dashed out of the room, and if ever that studio door was slammed, it was slammed then.

"Women are strange creatures," muttered Leigh to himself, as he went on, from memory, putting lights and shadows into the hair. "She must have been awfully fond of Monsieur Pichon, poor thing!" And then he began to whistle,

"Je suis le mari de la reine—
Ri de la reine, ri de la reine."

CHAPTER III.

We all know Banquerouteville-sur-Mer. In the good old days when sheriff's officers had a "high old time"; and when British spendthrifts, like Joseph of old, were perpetually being cast into prison, Banquerouteville-sur-Mer was the much-desired haven of rest for the debtor who couldn't, or wouldn't, pay. Banquerouteville is gay and cheap, twenty-five francs go to the pound; and a franc is any day as good as a shilling, or rather better, in Banquerouteville. Captains Ragg and Famish, though denied the pleasures of Cremorne, could dance in the dust at the Tintelleries with the crispest of little French fisher-maidens, and together with Mr. Seedyman, late of Newmarket, they could wind up their evening with a snug little supper at the café on the pier, or with the cheaper joys of bad oysters at threepence a dozen. Seedyman and his friends could live for next to nothing—particularly in the winter—at any of the cheap hotels or boarding-houses with which the place swarms.

The general plea of Britishers for a prolonged residence at Banquerouteville-sur-Mer was its advantages from an educational point of view; and truth to tell, there are almost as many schools in the place as there are hotels and pensions. There is no doubt whatever about the air, the country is charming, the bathing perfect, and rents are low.

About a mile out of the town is the Château des Tourterelles. Now the Château des Tourterelles has rejoiced in its name for the last hundred and fifty years; and though the evil-minded would chuckle and make bad jokes on the coincidence, it was a purely fortuitous circumstance that the Château des Tourterelles was what we should call in good plain English, a girls' boarding-school. Madame Pouilly, the principal, was an extremely clever person, and, if ever there was one, a woman of the world. Many years ago she had bought the business, paying a good round sum for it; and from the first she made it answer from a financial point of view. She did not underfeed her girls; she did not overwork them; but she insisted that the article that went through her educational mill should be turned out, in appearance at least, as a well-mannered young lady of high principle. When she was unfortunate enough to get hold of a real black sheep,

Madame Pouilly did not hesitate for an instant; she expelled the offender from the heaven of the Château des Tourterelles, to the outer darkness beyond its little world.

The day had been a busy one. The big school-room had been swept and garnished. Three hundred cane-bottomed chairs, duly numbered and arranged in rows, had held the three hundred friends and relatives of Madame Pouilly and her eighty boarders. The professors, ranged in a semicircle, had presented an imposing array—there had been a round dozen of them—and they looked—for that one day in the year, at all events—twelve academicians at the very least. They had all donned the regulation white cravat, which is the sign with Frenchmen of a serious function. Even Herr Dummer, the German professor (in France all teachers are professors; it costs nothing and sounds well) had actually washed his hands for the august ceremony, and had been temporarily deprived, to his intense discomfort, of his eternal snuff-box. As for Madame herself, there was something sublimely awful about her; her rich black dress of corded silk, whose stiffness would be more correctly described by a reference to plate armour than to the traditional deal board, inspired terror and respect among the male portion of the

audience, and undisguised envy among the ladies. There was no gentle *frou-frou* about Madame's dress —it absolutely creaked.

The vicaire of the cathedral presided. As for the eighty young ladies, they all looked pictures of health and happiness, for the ceremonial was the public distribution of prizes, and at its conclusion Madame Pouilly's establishment would break up for the summer holidays.

The young ladies sang; they played their Chopin; they recited their Racine; and at each fresh effort the discreet applause of the delighted audience became louder. Then the old vicaire gave away the prizes, and ended his task by placing on the head of the eldest and prettiest of Madame Pouilly's girls a laurel wreath, as the prize of general good conduct and continuous progress. We, in England, should look upon this latter performance as intensely ridiculous; but in France it is not so regarded, and the pupil who is lucky enough to be decorated with the wreath is as proud of the simple trophy as were the successful athletes at the Olympian games of old. And now the vicaire made a pretty little speech. He told his audience that "that day was a momentous one for some of them; that from that day some of them would be deprived of the advice and the more

than motherly care of his dear old friend, Madame Pouilly; that henceforward their trust must be in Heaven and themselves." And then the vicaire improved the occasion. There were a good many moist eyes among the elder girls. And the ceremony concluded, the audience filed out, the professors bowed to their pupils and to the guests, and the young ladies were left to their own devices.

All the girls were looking flushed and excited after the ceremonial of the distribution of prizes—the great annual event of their young lives. There was not a girl amongst the whole of Madame Pouilly's pupils who had not received at least one crimson-covered book with gilt edges. Even the stupid red-cheeked daughter of the grocer in the Grande Rue —who was currently reported to be received on the mutual system—the natural butt of the entire bevy of artless and artful girls, and the upper part of whose fat arms were black with frequent pinching, proudly clutched a huge volume of poetry for the young, the well-earned reward of her progress in the useful art of plain needlework. They were all dressed in their best, and all in white too for the matter of that—a colour which became the little ones, but hardly suited the great majority of the pupils, who were, of course, what are termed grow-

ing girls—unhappy creatures whose feet, hands, and elbows appeared for the present, at least, to be abnormally developed. They resembled young puppies in many other ways; their enormous appetites were only equalled by their high spirits; careless of the future, they enjoyed the present, and, like the puppies, all their troubles were to come.

One girl alone presented a striking contrast to the rest of Madame Pouilly's *pensionnaires*. She alone, among the chattering crowd, could be described as really graceful. There was a pensive expression in the lovely face, and a far-away look about her big, clear, honest blue eyes. Her hair, like that of the rest of her companions, was demurely braided, according to the stern and classic rule of Madame Pouilly's establishment; but twist and torture her luxuriant blonde tresses as she might, rebellious little curls and love locks would burst out here and there. It was magnificent hair, and there was an abundance of it; but its quantity was not its only characteristic. What was most remarkable about Mademoiselle Hélène Montuy's hair was its colour: it was what the French call *blond cendré*. We have no phrase for it in our language; indeed, in this country it is hardly ever seen, and it is rare indeed even in France. Its happy pos-

sessors are invariably of a highly romantic and generally melancholy temperament; not the temperament which characterises the blonde German *Mädchen* —the girl who sighs and looks, and sighs and looks again, and then sits down and eats a supper which would do credit to a couple of hungry grenadiers. Marguerite is all very well in the picture-books, with her two long straw-coloured tails, which somehow remind one of the advertisement of the infallible hairwash. It may be doubted whether the young woman is one bit romantic. She sighs, she eats more than is good for her, she takes insufficient exercise, and her end is bound to be fatty degeneration in some form or other. But one could see plainly enough that Mademoiselle Montuy was a romantic girl, and an affectionate one withal; for on her lap was seated the pest and pet of the establishment—a dimpled baby of some seven years, who was examining, with a delighted interest, the pictures in one of the many red-covered prizes which had fallen to Mademoiselle Montuy's share, the leaves of which the elder girl was carefully turning for her.

"It all seems like a dream, Hélène. Are you really to be married to-morrow to Dr. Tholozan—the great Dr. Tholozan? And will you live in Paris; in dear, wonderful, delightful Paris—the Paris which

I dream of, but which I have never seen? Oh, how I envy you! how we all envy you!" said a pretty gipsy-like girl at her side.

Hélène smiled. "I am two years older than you, child; why, I am nineteen, it's quite a patriarchal age; but your turn will come, Louise, never fear."

The two girls left the chattering crowd in the big schoolroom, and passed through one of the open windows into the prim little garden; for on this one day in the year Madame Pouilly's garden was at the disposition of the young ladies.

"You ought to be very, very happy," the younger girl repeated, as she passed her arm round her companion's slender waist.

"I'm very, very grateful, Louise, to Dr. Tholozan, for, after all, I am but a penniless orphan. Unlike the donkey, dear Louise, I did not hesitate long between the proverbial bunches of hay. I was surprised and astonished, Louise, but I could not doubt. Of two evils always choose the lesser, dear. It was a choice between remaining here, probably for life, with Madame Pouilly; to cut the bread and butter, to correct the exercises, to teach the little ones their scales all the mornings; while my evenings would have to be spent in the uncongenial occupations of

darning their dreadful stockings, and making up the quarterly accounts: it was that or marrying Dr. Tholozan."

"And did he put it very nicely, Hélène? Was he very lover-like?"

"Ah, no, dear. He let me see very plainly that it was a sacrifice on his part. But he was very courteous, though cold, terribly cold. 'Mademoiselle,' he said, 'pray be seated,' and he placed a chair for me as if I had been an empress. 'You, mademoiselle, are no longer a child; the time has come when you naturally would expect from me an explanation as to your position and your future prospects. Dear young lady,' he continued, 'my guardianship was the result of a foolish promise made to a dying friend. I, alas, was once enthusiastic.' He sighed as he said these words, and ran his fingers through his scanty grey hair. 'Yes,' he went on, 'I was foolish enough once to be an enthusiast; but that is a long time ago. As for your fortune, my child, it consisted simply of your father's debts. Should you see fit you can remain here as Madame Pouilly's assistant.' I shuddered involuntarily. 'I must admit that the prospect is not inviting,' continued the doctor. 'Had I a wife of my own, I should be glad to offer you a home myself; but at

your age, mademoiselle, old bachelor as I am, that would be impossible; the *convenances* would not permit it. But there is yet another proposition. Do not be startled, do not be horrified. I am close upon sixty; on the wrong side of it, mind, not the right. I do not love you, mademoiselle.' Here I blushed furiously. 'That is a bad habit, my child, which you will do well to combat. I do not love you,' he repeated, he even emphasised the word; 'nevertheless I am prepared to marry you. Don't misunderstand me. It is from no feeling of duty, from no feeling of friendship to your dead father, but simply as a means of escape from an unpleasant dilemma.'"

"Oh, Hélène, he could only have said it to try you!"

"Don't interrupt me, dear. Dr. Tholozan and I are both matter-of-fact people," and her lip trembled a little as she said the words. "He continued, 'My dear young lady, I have a fair professional income, I live in a big house which is my own property, and may be worth a hundred thousand francs, but I have saved no money. If you consider that it is worth your while to marry me for the sake of a sum of money which would bring you in the pittance of five thousand francs a year, at my death I will

settle the house upon you. But you must remember that there are two sides to the bargain; for bargain it is, and nothing more nor less. In the first place, I may live to be a very old man; that in itself is a great drawback. In any case, I should expect my wife to entertain my friends, and to do me credit in the eyes of the world, never to disobey me, and never to disgrace me; above all things, never to make me ridiculous.' 'Dr. Tholozan!' I said. 'Stop, mademoiselle; do not answer me hastily. With your permission, I shall step into Madame Pouilly's charming garden, and smoke one cigarette. That will give you time to consider the matter, and I shall return then for my answer.' My guardian rose, raised the tips of my fingers to his lips, and with a low bow walked into the garden, leaving me to my own reflections."

"Hélène, it is horrible!" cried her confidante. "Your guardian is a bad man, a wicked man."

"Don't say so, Louise, for to-morrow Dr. Tholozan will be my husband, and I must try to make the best of my—my bargain," she added with a little sob. "But let me tell you the rest, and then judge me as you will, Louise; but not too hardly, dear friend. I have been ten years in this house, for ten long years without a break; and for

ten long years I have longed for a home of my own. You and the others, dear, have gone away to your happy homes, to your fathers, your mothers, and your loving relatives. I, Louise, with the exception of Dr. Tholozan, haven't a friend in the world. For the last three years this place has seemed to me a prison; the only means of escape for me is to marry Dr. Tholozan. And I shall marry him to-morrow; and it will not be my fault if, after a time, he does not love me. He is a man of world-wide reputation, and it is an honour for me to be married to such a man. When he returned I told him so. He only laughed a little laugh, and then he rang the bell, and asked to see Madame Pouilly. When she entered the room he made a profound bow. 'Madame,' he said, 'it will perhaps hardly surprise you to hear that my ward and I are about to become united by a yet closer tie. Madame,' he continued, 'I have the honour to present to you the young lady who is about to become my wife. Let me take the present opportunity of thanking you, madame, for the more than maternal care you have lavished upon her for so many years. We trust that you will accept from us this little trifle,' he handed her a morocco case. 'We have yet two other favours to ask of you, dear madame: that you will grace the

approaching ceremony with your presence, and that you will permit it to take place from this house. All the necessary formalities and the usual notices to the civil and religious authorities I have attended to. As Mademoiselle Montuy has no living female relatives, will you further oblige us by purchasing for her a suitable trousseau?' and he placed in her hands a cheque for five thousand francs. At all events, my future husband is generous. Madame burst into a flood of compliments. The doctor allowed her to run down. He evidently felt that were he to interrupt her, she would only recommence with renewed vigour. When Madame had exhausted all her phrases he looked at his watch. 'I fear I have intruded on your valuable time,' he said, and then he kissed my finger tips once more, and declining Madame's reiterated offers of refreshment, took his leave. I have not seen him since, Louise. That was three days ago, and we are to be married to-morrow."

"But he loves you, dear Hélène, I'm sure he loves you. Those sparkling earrings and that magnificent ring speak for him, dear."

"In a way, child; in a way, perhaps," said the elder girl, meditatively. "But we must not forget that they used to parade their sacrifices of old

adorned with flowers. These are my adornments, Louise, and the sacrifice is for to-morrow. But no, I wrong him," said the girl, as she drew herself up proudly; "it is not a sacrifice, it is but a bargain; and I will try to perform loyally my part of the contract." As she spoke her lips trembled once more. "God forgive me!" she cried, "God forgive me!" And then she flung herself into her friend's arms, and burst into a flood of tears.

CHAPTER IV.

DR. THOLOZAN'S honeymoon was more than half over. The first portion had been spent at Folkestone; and now the newly-married pair were to taste the sweets of country life, and the cloying joys of the *dolce far niente*. One cannot thoroughly appreciate this Neapolitan delight, unless one is really alone or in a solitude of two, without books, friends, or acquaintances, deprived of all pursuits, duties, and fads; and then it must be confessed that a very little of it goes a long way. Theoretically, of course, particularly on a dull November day in chilly England, one is apt to envy the freedom from care of the Lazzarone, his sun, his cigarette, and his melon. It cannot be denied that as one thinks of wet boots, of reeking umbrellas and steaming garments, and as one looks out of the window at the driving rain, one envies the Lazzarone the genial warmth which must penetrate his very marrow. But warmth, however genial, is apt to develop into unpleasant heat. A stone slab, though a picturesque object enough,

makes a very hard bed, and even the cigarette and the melon have to be earned or stolen. Then at sunset, although the Lazzarone hears the soothing toll of the vesper bell, he also hears the tiny trumpeting of the bloodthirsty mosquito, which warns him that for the present his demigod existence is over, and he must cease to be a lotos-eater.

Dr. and Madame Tholozan were lotos-eaters with a vengeance at present. Theoretically they were free from carking care of every description The young wife had no cause to dread the daily ordeal of the terrible interview with the cook; for the watchful care of Madame Pouilly had provided the villa of the *Two Grenadiers* with an artiste of surpassing excellence, a woman of fine feeling and fertile imagination, a lady who had the three hundred *menus* of Baron Brisse at her fingers' ends; a conscientious woman, in fact, who, sooner than send up a bad meal, would commit suicide in her own oven. Neither the doctor nor his young wife had ever been in England before; to them John Bull and his island were novelties; the every-day events of life, at the English watering-place, had been to them a revelation. They treat you very well at the Royal, and indeed lavish a sort of affectionate solicitude upon all newly-married couples. But now the pair were back in

France, settled for a fortnight at the charming little villa in the environs of Banquerouteville, which is known to natives and visitors alike as the *Two Grenadiers*. Two life-size plaster figures of a couple of ferocious representatives of the Old Guard keep perpetual watch and ward over the little villa; hence its name. The owner might far more appropriately have placed a pair of Cupids there; the fact that he got the grenadiers cheap was probably the original cause of their selection. It was the very beau ideal of a temporary residence for a newly-married pair. It stood in a little miniature garden of Eden of its own, and there were not one but many apple trees in it. There were bowers, rustic arbours, and summer-houses; there was a grotto and a fountain, flowers in profusion; and, as everybody knows, the climate of the environs of Banquerouteville in summer is at once balmy and salubrious. Then, too, there was an abundance of fruit; but the strawberries were over, and practically the only fruits in the great umbrageous garden that it was possible to eat just now were the currants, about which there is a want of poetry, and the still more prosaic gooseberry.

Dr. Tholozan and his wife had walked in the garden, had eaten the gooseberries, and had exhausted the various sights of Banquerouteville-sur-Mer. They

had been to the great forest; they had ascended Napoleon's column; they had driven to the so-called Happy Valley; they had inspected the mysterious fisher village of Portel; they had visited and laughed at the great silent sleepy collection of rubbish known as the Museum; and twice a day they had driven about along the dusty high roads, and through the pretty lanes. If the truth must be told, the pair were feeling just a little bit bored—not that they admitted the fact to themselves for a single instant. The doctor smoked a little more than was good for him, and rather longed for his patients, his club, and his quiet evenings in the big studio at home. It is very difficult for a man of sixty to invent congenial subjects of conversation for a girl of nineteen; and what can the girl of nineteen have to tell to the man of sixty? A younger man would have the ever delightful future to dilate upon; but the future at sixty is rather a painful subject with most of us, and, as for the past, usually the less said about that the better.

The pair were seated in a couple of lounge chairs in a little arbour; great masses of vine leaves protected them from the fierce glare of the afternoon sun. They sat staring over the sunlit masses of foliage, probably for the same reason that the stars

look down on us, because they have nothing else to do. Presently the doctor broke the silence.

"Hélène," he said, "I fear you must regret the loss of your young companions, and the life at Madame Pouilly's."

"Oh no," replied the girl, with a sunny smile, "all is new to me now. I have the world before me, and I am no longer friendless, Felix," she added, with a little blush, as she affectionately laid her dimpled fingers upon the doctor's cold white hand.

Her husband gazed at her with an appreciative smile. It was the first time she had addressed him by his Christian name.

"It was very *triste* indeed at Madame Pouilly's," the girl went on, "we were but machines there; and every hour in the week was mapped out for us with monotonous regularity. And one got up so early. While now it's quite a whirl of novelty and excitement. I shall never forget our English journey, and the strange solemn people we saw, who talked so little and who ate so much. I shall never forget those two English Sundays, and how sad all those good people looked. But it is not so in Paris; in Paris they are gay. Tell me, is it not so?"

"Yes, that is our business in Paris, the sad business of our lives," said the doctor, with a sort of

groan. "We are gay enough in Paris, even the very poor. But don't expect too much, Hélène, my child; you may find yet that there's sadness enough in Paris to make you wish that you had never left your quiet home at Madame Pouilly's."

"Oh, but I shall have so much to do, so much to think of, and so much to learn. I do so long to see my new home," cried the girl, with enthusiasm.

"So did Madame Bluebeard, my child. And no doubt she was happy enough there at first till she got hold of the key of the mysterious cupboard, and her husband wanted to cut off her head."

"But he did give her the key though, after all, Felix. He must have been very fond of her to do that."

"She probably coaxed it out of him, my child."

"He couldn't have been so very bad, after all, if he submitted to coaxing."

"Well, I don't know. No doubt her five predecessors had all coaxed him in their turn; but Boulotte found them hanging up in the Blue Cupboard, minus their little fingers, nevertheless."

"Ah, but that was a fairy tale, and there's no Blue Cupboard at home"—the girl lingered affectionately over the word—"is there, Felix?"

The doctor laughed.

"Besides," she continued, "you're not a bit like Bluebeard."

"I'm not so sure of that. I'm a terribly jealous monster."

"Well, if you insist on playing at Bluebeard, Felix, tell me all about my five unfortunate deceased rivals."

"I'm not sure that they are all dead, my child; particularly number one. She was Ambition, and I believe I love her still."

"Be true to her, Felix, and I shall respect—and love you all the more," and the soft delicate tints of the girl's snowy neck became flushed with rosy red. "And the rest?"

"The next was Avarice. But when my poor brother died I gave her up, and she is comfortably buried long ago. I have forgotten the names of the other three, Madame Tholozan, since I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance," said the doctor, with a sort of old-fashioned courtesy that rather became him than not.

"Oh, guardian," said the girl, dropping unconsciously into the phrase that had so lately been habitual with her, "if you only knew how dear a compliment is to a young girl! We never hear them at school."

"Dr. Tholozan's wife will hear plenty of them

in Paris, and learn to estimate them at their proper value, I trust," the doctor added.

"And don't you long for home, Felix?" said the girl, after a meditative pause.

"When a man is my age, my child, his daily routine becomes a sort of necessity to him. But my outing has been a very pleasant one; perhaps I shall not offend you when I say, Hélène, that I have never been so happy as since our marriage." The doctor looked twenty years younger as he said the words, and again the blushes rose on his companion's tell-tale face. "I don't think, Hélène," he said, "that you'll find it so dull, perhaps, at home as here, or at Madame Pouilly's. You'll have a companion, at all events."

"I have one now, Felix."

"Ay, but of your own age, child."

"Yes. Madame Pichon is quite young, is she not? Poor thing, how she must suffer!"

"On the contrary, my child, Sophie is the gayest of the gay."

"Then I'm afraid I sha'n't like her, Felix."

"Nobody ever disliked Sophie. You and she will be sworn friends before you've been half an hour together. Everybody tells me that Sophie is charming, and everybody must be right."

"But her recent loss, Felix?"

"She manages to bear it, my child; everything comes to those who wait, even a second husband. It won't surprise me in the least to hear that Sophie has consoled herself on my return. My artist friend seems to take up a great deal of her time, and Sophie herself says she would do anything for art; and I daresay she would, particularly when art is personified by a young painter of prepossessing appearance."

"Then they love each other, Felix, these two?"

"You must judge for yourself, my child, when you see them. Here is a letter I had from her this morning. Read it."

Madame Tholozan took the thick sheet of scented paper which her husband handed her, and read as follows:

"DEAR COUSIN FELIX,—We are longing for your arrival,—when I say we, I mean Mr. Leigh and I,—as well as all our acquaintances, to whom I have shown the charming portrait of your wife, and who are all, the men especially, dying to make her acquaintance. Of course the *convenances* do not permit of my going to your house now without a duenna; though the duty of furnishig Madame Tholozan's

boudoir has made my daily presence there a *necessity*. Monsieur Leigh has given me the benefit of his artistic suggestions; the result is charming. I proposed amber satin; but Monsieur Leigh, after a profound study of the photograph, overruled me in favour of pale blue and silver. *Of course he was right;* so blue and silver it is. He has been quite enthusiastic in the matter, and has been good enough to accompany me to all the furniture shops. *You ought to be very grateful to both of us.* It's been quite a labour of love, but terribly embarrassing; for the shop people persist in looking upon me as George's *fiancée*, and dreadful complications have been the result. George has behaved very well in the matter, giving up a great deal of his time. If I were a vain woman, I should fancy he liked shopping with me, but my better reason tells me he has been sacrificing himself for the sake of his old friend. And now I have to confess to an extravagance. Unknown to George, I have purchased from that hateful Monsieur Israels the picture of Niobe. Never in my whole life have I been so angry as when George coolly informed me that he had parted with it. Were it not for his absurd carelessness about money I should have felt inclined to think him mercenary. Moreover, he was very rude over the matter. When I expressed my

astonishment, he said with a laugh, 'Niobe was only a pot-boiler, after all.' Did he dare to compare me to a cookmaid, or was he hinting that what the late Monsieur Pichon used to call 'my charming embonpoint' was attaining a prosaic plumpness? I thought the monster meant I was getting fat. Alas! I know too well that plumpness is the fatal grave towards which blonde beauties of my sympathetic type invariably tend. You, Felix, as my cousin and honorary body physician, have often and often told me this, with the cruel coarseness habitual with the more serious members of your profession. I tried to explain it all to George: I told him how for months I had followed a dreadful diet table, and had eaten only what was nasty; how I had even denied myself bonbons—a consolation to which young women in my unfortunate situation habitually fly. But he only laughed. However, that very afternoon I drove him through the Champs Elysées, and we took cream ices at the little châlet on the lake; but it was not for the cream ices that I visited the châlet, though they are notoriously the most delicious in all Paris. No, it was for a more prosaic purpose. I meant to be weighed, and weighed I was. Seventy-five kilos, Felix; not a centigramme more! I didn't say a word, but I gave him one triumphant look, and he seemed

considerably confused; and then he told me a very interesting artistic fact, for he said that seventy-five kilos was the exact weight of the Venus de Medici. But my triumph didn't end there. 'Your Venus de Medici,' said I, 'may have weighed seventy-five kilos, but I very much doubt if she wore number six gloves; I always do.' I spread out my hands, and to my intense annoyance bang went my left-hand glove right across the palm. (Of course this letter is in confidence, and you are on no account to show it to your wife. You will, though, for a certainty; for as I used frequently to tell poor Pichon, there is no fool like an old fool.) And now I must give you a word of advice. Unless you want to make yourself supremely ridiculous, it is *perfectly impossible* that George should go on living with you as he has done. The presence of a young, charming, *and probably designing girl*—for all very, very fair women are designing—would surely very much interfere with his work; and, as he has absolutely nothing but his profession to depend upon, it would be a very great pity indeed. Since I have sat for him for Sigismonda and Niobe I have often thought that it would be better for him, perhaps, if he married; for if she were really nice looking it would save him the absurd sums he lavishes on models. How sad it must be for any young

man to be continually exposed to the *dangerous fascinations* of a succession of young persons of painfully prepossessing appearance! When I suggested it to him he said he should see how the experiment worked with you, and act accordingly. Dear Felix, I do so hope you will be happy. But to return to what I was saying: *Monsieur Leigh can't go on living here.* When I pointed out the impropriety of it, he said that you were the best judge, that he should never find a studio to suit him so well as his present one; and the way he pores over your wife's photograph is most exasperating. He says he is studying it; and he had the audacity to wonder whether she would sit to him. I pointed out to him the impossibility and the impropriety of such a thing; and then he retorted *with wicked ingratitude* that as I, his old friend's cousin, had sat to him, he didn't see why she, his old friend's wife, shouldn't. We nearly quarrelled over it, and if he is like this now, Felix, *what will he be when she arrives in person;* particularly if she encourages him—which she is sure to do? Come home as soon as you can, dear Felix. I am dying to give a sister's welcome to my cousin's wife. Pray tell the dear child that, broken down as I am by my recent terrible affliction, I have yet a corner in my heart for her. Give her the assurance

of my loving sympathy; and, above all things, ask her whether she would like the finger-plates of the boudoir door to be of pale blue porcelain or frosted silver. George and I *have had words* on this matter; but I would scorn, by even a hint, to influence dear Hélène's decision on so important a point. It would be mean; it would be dishonourable. Come home as soon as you can, Felix. You must both be tired of *le parfait amour* by this time, and I am longing to return to the happy evenings we used to spend together in the great studio. Farewell. Remember, not a word to George about the Niobe.

Ever your own affectionate but heart-broken cousin, "SOPHIE.

"P.S.—During your absence I am sorry to say that George has spent most of his evenings at the *Mirlitons*. Hurry back, if only to *save* the poor young fellow from the *contamination* of that disgraceful set."

The husband and wife looked at each other. The doctor smiled, and Madame Tholozan burst into a peal of silvery laughter.

"Madame Pichon," she said, "seems very anxious about the finger-plates, and tells us a good deal about your friend. Is there a *tendresse?*"

"My child, my cousin is a woman of very large affections. They might both do worse, I think. She is enthusiastic and wealthy, and he is a dreamer of dreams, but a clever dreamer, notwithstanding. You will like them both, I think."

The doctor closed his eyes. Whether it was the effect of his cousin's letter or the heat of the weather, who can tell? but he asserted his husband's privilege, and slid gently but rapidly into the land of dreams.

Hélène did not sleep, she too dreamed; but hers were day-dreams—the bright sunny day-dreams of of the inexperienced girl. She looked forward with pleasant anticipations to the society of this pair of lovers, who were evidently playing at cross purposes; to the unknown delights of the joyous world before her, which was so soon to open its golden glories in the great city of pleasure; and as she smiled she gazed meditatively at the little golden circlet on her finger, and idly turned it round and round. And then she felt a world of pity for her husband's disconsolate cousin—the heart-broken Sophie; and then she smiled as she thought of the widow's evident jealousy as to her own portrait. She wondered at the novel theory that all very fair women were designing, and she promised herself a little innocent revenge, in the mildest possible flirtation with the

gentleman who had such an accurate knowledge of the weight of the Venus de Medici. But as she looked at her sleeping husband she cast aside the idea as base and ignoble. And then she began to ponder about the important subject of the finger-plates. And then the ivory eyelids closed, and the radiant orbs were hidden by the heavy lashes. The bees went on humming, the sleepy murmur of the bubbling fountain and the cooing of the doves were the only sounds that broke the silence in the little garden of the villa of the Two Grenadiers. Some fairy visions seemed to be flitting through the mind of the sleeping girl. It could not have been the gruesome story of Beauty and the Beast; perhaps it was the *féerie* of Prince Charming. Who can tell? They were happy visions, for the girl smiled as she dreamt them; and as her husband woke with a start, and rubbed his eyes, he gazed in astonished admiration at the improvised tableau of the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood he saw before him.

"Ah," thought he, "I can admire it all, but I can't appreciate her as she deserves. If my young friend were only here where could he find a more delighful subject for a picture?"

And so the time sped idly by. One day was very much like another at the villa of the Two Grenadiers.

"It has been very pleasant while it lasted," said the doctor to himself, as he finished packing his portmanteau, and turned the key with a click. "I have been living in a fool's paradise, I suppose, for the last month. I wonder whether Hélène repents the bargain yet, poor child!"

But there was nothing sorrowful about the girl as she entered the room, looking fresh as a rose in her pretty figured muslin and her big straw hat with a single great white ostrich feather.

"Button my gloves for me, Felix," she said, coquettishly; "and pity me, my dear husband, pity me from the bottom of your heart," she added with a merry laugh, "and help me to break it to Madame Pichon when we arrive; for they are number seven, Felix, and horribly tight."

CHAPTER V.

MADAME THOLOZAN'S DIARY.

* * * * *

IT would be perfectly hopeless to attempt to fill up the blank which occupies the last month, and which has probably been the most eventful period of my life. Occurrences have followed each other so rapidly that I have become bewildered. I'm not quite sure whether I ought to keep a diary at all; it is so terribly compromising, as Sophie puts it. It was all very well for Hélène Montuy, Dr. Tholozan's penniless pensioner: now it is a different matter. And yet after all it's a great relief to be able to write down what one thinks just as one thinks it. One can be so terribly frank, and one hurts nobody's feelings.

How glad I am that I followed my first impulse, and accepted Dr. Tholozan's proposition. He hasn't had the heart once since our marriage to allude to what he called, at the time of his formal proposal, "our bargain." I verily believe that Felix is in love with me. Otherwise, why should he have been so

terribly extravagant about this little nest of mine? For people in our position such recklessness is almost wicked. My husband told me that he had nothing but his income and this house, therefore this pretty boudoir of mine is a piece of extravagance, and consequently a proof of affection. Only this morning Madame Pichon said to me, "If a man love us, my dear, he is ready to ruin himself for us." Bankruptcy meaning love, extravagance must indicate affection: this was Sophie's argument, and she declares that Felix adores me. Madame Pouilly's last words I shall never forget: "Be careful of him, Hélène," she said; "make yourself indispensable to him; and remember that when good looks are gone, my child, affection may still remain. Look at these old slippers of mine, my dear; they are old, but I love them, they are so delightfully comfortable." And are my husband and I never to be more to each other than Madame Pouilly's old slippers are to her?

I rather tremble at the ordeal I have to go through. Next Thursday we shall be formally At Home, and I shall make the acquaintance of all the good people whose cards are lying here in a great heap before me. Sophie tells me that the men are all impossible, and the women monuments of antiquity. "As to the men, my dear," says my new friend, "they are nearly all

bald; baldness, science, and snuff-taking go together. But old as they are, and ugly as they are—and though they do stand in corners, and whisper to each other about all the ologies—yet I declare they all make love to me. Susanna and the Elders, my dear; history repeats itself." Madame Pichon is always profane and respects nobody, not even my husband.

I do hope I sha'n't make Felix ashamed of me; and I am so glad that Sophie is staying with us for the first month.

Madame Tholozan laid down her pen, replaced her diary in the escritoire, and leant back in her chair; and then she gave a long look of satisfaction at her pretty surroundings. Pale blue and silver were the ruling idea; and young Mr. Leigh had been right, when he had chosen the combination as the most suitable frame to set off the dreamy blonde beauty of the young wife. Considerable care had evidently been expended in the matter. One thing was quite certain—expense had been disregarded. There was a profusion of trifles; but every little object seemed a work of art. The little white cottage piano was an Erard. The four little water-colour sketches, which Madame Pichon had pronounced "delicious trifles," would have made the

mouth of Monsieur Israels himself water. Even the great white Persian cat, who sprawled in sleepy enjoyment upon the fur hearth-rug of white lamb skins, was a masterpiece in his way; a thoroughbred animal with one blue eye and one yellow one, having also the valuable defect of being as deaf as a post. Although the furniture was of the latest fashion, it was all thoroughly comfortable; for Madame Pichon herself had sat in all the chairs, and reclined on the various settees and ottomans.

"A chair, Monsieur George," she had remarked, "is a thing to sit upon, and not a stool of repentance. The late Monsieur Pichon placed himself unreservedly in the hands of his upholsterer, and gave him *carte blanche.* The result is gilded misery. It's my belief," she added, solemnly, "that men would be seen much more in their own wives' drawing-rooms if they only had something nice to sit upon."

Madame Pichon had her way; and one had only to sit down in any of the seats in Madame Tholozan's boudoir to feel instantly that life was worth living.

Madame Tholozan sat herself down before the little open piano, and ran her fingers along the keys. "How different," she thought, "from the terrible in-

struments at Madame Pouilly's, which always jangled, and were never in tune." A really good piano was a revelation to the girl; she preluded vaguely, and at length broke into the triumphal march in Judas Maccabæus; then she rattled through the overture to the Black Domino; then she played a succession of sentimental ballads; and then very slowly, very solemnly, and very carefully, she played Lefebure Wely's *Ave Maria,* and then she burst into tears.

The door opened, and Madame Pichon entered the room.

"What, crying, Hélène, already? Has Felix been grumbling because there's no pepper in the cream tarts, or have you a silent sorrow there?" and she placed her chubby little hand upon the region of her heart. "Don't let concealment, like the worm in the bud, feed on your damask cheek. What is it, Hélène? Have you, too, a romance? Confide in me, my dear child. I am discretion itself."

But Madame Tholozan, who had risen to her feet, was already laughing through her tears. "There is nothing to confide, dear Sophie," she said. "They were but tears of joy. I was only thinking how good Felix has been to me."

"Ah, little prude. You have no sentiment, no

passion; you do not know what it is to have wildly loved, and to have had all your fond illusions destroyed at a single blow. I have got used to it. Why, I once filled an entire album with the most charming, the most delicious of operatic celebrities; it was my first luxury after I married Monsieur Pichon. How well I remember the frontispiece. I worshipped it with the sentimental affection of a young girl; it was M. Frontin as Don Giovanni. On the very first opportunity I made my husband take me to see the Opera; the photograph didn't even do him justice; but, oh, what a terrible awakening, Hélène! Only three evenings afterwards my husband, with an amused smile, formally introduced a gentleman to me at a soirée at our banker's house. 'Madame,' he said, with a bow, 'allow me to present to you my distinguished acquaintance, Monsieur Frontin.' He was of unmistakable Hebrew origin, my dear, and as bald as an egg. I thought I should have fainted. We all have our disillusions, my dear."

Madame Tholozan laughed.

"And how do you like *l'ami de la maison*, our young artist?" continued the widow.

"Oh, he's very nice, of course; a little silent, perhaps."

"Oh, naturally he would be bashful with you at first. I don't think he's really timid, though; it's merely a way he has. These English are torpid, you know; and very young men are always uncomfortable and ill at ease with married women. I'm very fond of him," said the widow, with a sigh, "we are quite like brother and sister."

"I saw that at once," said the doctor's wife.

"Felix has been talking nonsense to you, I suppose, my dear. I don't mind telling you in confidence that I do feel an interest in the young fellow's future. At all events," said the widow, in a solemn voice, "his hair is his own. There's a great charm about an artist, Hélène. They are so delightfully wicked; but the worst of Monsieur Leigh is that he has absolutely no romance. You've heard about the Niobe, Hélène? For a whole fortnight I sat to that young man, and though he didn't say very much, he looked unutterable things. A man can say a great deal by his looks, my dear. Now in your case it is very possible that George's looks tell nothing, or next to nothing; to me they say a great deal. Tell-tale eyes, my dear, that speak a mysterious language, which I have learnt thoroughly to understand. They seem to say to me, 'Madame Pichon'—for he is too discreet to even think of me

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to rough in the London streets while driving are a great drawback to conversation; but nothing interrupted the flow of the ladies' chatter, as Madame Pichon's luxurious turn-out rolled on its rubber tyres over the smooth asphalt. It was all new to Hélène. Though Paris was comparatively empty, and hired carriages greatly predominated in the Bois, yet she had never seen so many people, all well dressed, and all evidently upon pleasure bent. Madame Pichon's circle of acquaintance was a very large one. The pretty widow bowed and smiled in every direction; she pointed out the celebrities, and she had a little bit of scandal to impart about almost everybody. Somehow or other Madame Pichon found that she was attracting more attention than usual; she put it down to her having left off her mourning rather prematurely; but the real fact was that in Paris, as in London, two very pretty women driving together will always be the cynosure of every eye. Madame Pichon, her two big grey horses, her venerable coachman who looked like an archbishop, and the well-known pair of Corsican brothers—the two monumental footmen who were so very much alike that you could not tell one from the other—were an ordinary sight enough in the Bois. But it was the new face that attracted attention; and the only per-

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to rough in the London streets while driving are a great drawback to conversation; but nothing interrupted the flow of the ladies' chatter, as Madame Pichon's luxurious turn-out rolled on its rubber tyres over the smooth asphalt. It was all new to Hélène. Though Paris was comparatively empty, and hired carriages greatly predominated in the Bois, yet she had never seen so many people, all well dressed, and all evidently upon pleasure bent. Madame Pichon's circle of acquaintance was a very large one. The pretty widow bowed and smiled in every direction; she pointed out the celebrities, and she had a little bit of scandal to impart about almost everybody. Somehow or other Madame Pichon found that she was attracting more attention than usual; she put it down to her having left off her mourning rather prematurely; but the real fact was that in Paris, as in London, two very pretty women driving together will always be the cynosure of every eye. Madame Pichon, her two big grey horses, her venerable coachman who looked like an archbishop, and the well-known pair of Corsican brothers—the two monumental footmen who were so very much alike that you could not tell one from the other—were an ordinary sight enough in the Bois. But it was the new face that attracted attention; and the only per-

by my baptismal name, at all events as yet. They are terribly cold, these islanders—'Madame Pichon, I love you with a respectful, but at the same time fervent admiration.' Yes, George has the greatest respect for the *convenances.*"

"Then why don't you encourage him, Sophie?"

"That would be fatal, my dear. To a man of his sensitive nature, the mere idea that I was what is vulgarly called 'setting my cap at him' would be sufficient to destroy my fondest hopes. He is terribly timid; his fingers used to tremble when he was settling the pose of my hands. That spoke for itself, of course. But we shall have plenty of time to talk about George. This afternoon, my dear, I want to carry you off; there need be no ceremony between us two, my child, so I sha'n't wait for a formal visit from you; but if you like we'll go for a drive, rest ourselves at my house, and be back here in time for dinner."

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son in the Bois who was able to give any information as to the owner of the charming face was young Mr. Leigh.

Young Leigh, in his quiet tweed suit, was sitting with two other men upon hired chairs in the walk which bounds the great drive. As the carriage passed Leigh raised his hat, both ladies bowed to him, and then he blushed. Yes: he actually blushed.

"*Sapristi*, my friend, is it then arranged with Niobe, that you look so terribly conscious, and she already assumes an air of proprietorship?"

"Tell me," burst in his second companion, "you who are about to console the widow of King Mausolus, who is the very charming person by her side; a charming woman, though in a different style? By the way she smiles, and her appearance of thorough enjoyment, she should be a provincial, or a foreigner. Is she one of your compatriots, my dear Leigh?"

"The lady is the newly married wife of my friend, Dr. Tholozan."

"Ah, then, this is the girl he so suddenly married without sounding drum or trumpet! My friend, speaking as a dramatist, I see the germs of a Palais Royal comedy, or of a melodrama, or even a tragedy."

Young Leigh laughed a happy careless laugh.

"Duvivier," he said, "Madame Pichon would doubtless protect me, and I don't think the doctor the sort of man to figure even in a Palais Royal farce."

"The doctor is a bold man. Where did he disinter this charming bride? Of course it was a love match; mutual infatuation, no doubt?"

There was a little flush of anger on Leigh's face as he answered sharply, "I don't suppose the doctor is the first man past middle age who has married a young and pretty wife."

"Beautiful, my young friend; beautiful," interposed the young man he had addressed as Duvivier.

"Beautiful, if you will. I pass the word. Yes, I suppose she is beautiful," he continued, dreamily; "no one can deny it. And why shouldn't our friend the doctor have a right to happiness after a long life of hard work?"

"And the lady, my philosophical friend, has she, too, no right to happiness? But I fear her chances are problematical; though of course as an old man's darling it is possible. Some women are unambitious. But you, Leigh, are doubtless so occupied with reproducing the charms of La Pichon, and then dis-

posing of them for untold gold, as to have little sympathy to waste on the fair odalisque of this aged pacha."

"Let us change the subject. It is distasteful to me;" and Leigh rose impatiently.

His friends took the hint; but they smiled and shook their heads in a silent chorus.

"You recognised George, of course, my dear, as we passed him?" said Madame Pichon to her companion. "Now if George had been a Frenchman he would have bowed to me with effusion. Dear fellow, he was afraid of compromising me. Why, when I was engaged to poor Monsieur Pichon, he used to kiss his finger tips to me wherever we met. Ah, the dear man was very proud of his proprietorship; but George is discretion itself. You can turn and drive home," said Madame Pichon to her coachman. Again they passed the three young men, and the smile that Madame Pichon vouchsafed to young Leigh was certainly not too discreet.

They soon reached the widow's house. A semi-circular drive, through an elaborately ornamental garden, brought them to the rather florid glass-and-iron structure which protected the entrance of Madame Pichon's charming house. The two ladies proceeded

at once to the drawing-room. The first thing that struck Madame Tholozan's eye, amidst the nondescript crowd of valuable but ill-chosen trifles which filled the room, was a plush easel which supported the picture of Niobe, Madame Pichon's latest extravagance.

"Is it like me, dear?" asked Dr. Tholozan's cousin, "or do you think he has flattered me too much?"

"Sophie, it is charming," said the young wife.

"I'm so glad you like it," said the widow. "The fact is, my dear, it's a little surprise I am preparing for George. You are all to dine here *en famille* the day after to-morrow; and to-morrow my portrait, as the mistress of this house, will replace poor dear Pichon's in the dining-room. Pichon was a benefactor to the human race; he was the founder, my dear, of Pichonville, where the great chocolate manufactory is, you know. I have felt it a duty to present his portrait to the mairie of the town. They take it away to-morrow. George, my dear, is a man of feeling; though I know he will hardly take his eyes off me during dinner-time, yet I feel that my late husband's portrait might bring painful reminiscences to his mind, and damp the pleasure of my entertainment. It is right to sacrifice oneself a little for

others, dear Hélène, is it not?" she added, with a little sigh; "and there could be no more appropriate place for my husband's picture than at Pichonville. Everybody laughs at me, Hélène, you know, as they used to laugh at Monsieur Pichon, on account of the chocolate. I used to be called la belle chocolatière. Vulgar people call me so still; but I shall never despise chocolate, for if it hadn't been for chocolate Monsieur Pichon wouldn't have been so rich—I shouldn't have married him; and without chocolate, the house that Jack built couldn't have existed. I couldn't have bought the Niobe, and everything would have been different. Ah, Hélène, Providence often works its ends in a strange and mysterious manner! No, I hope I am loyal to poor Pichon's memory. I never, never *will* despise chocolate. Once a day, my dear, I subject myself to a little penance. I let all my people see that there is no false pride about me. I partake of a cup of that nutritious beverage which my poor husband spent a long time in perfecting. As I said before, he was a benefactor of the human race, Hélène."

At that moment a footman entered with two cups of steaming fluid.

"Ah," continued the widow, in a solemn whisper, "he was a great man, poor Pichon; let us drink to

his memory in silence, dear Hélène, in the beverage he loved so well. You like it, Hélène?"

"It's delicious, Sophie," assented Madame Tholozan.

"Yes; it cheers, but it does not inebriate. Poor Pichon died of it; it was a necessity of his existence. He sank, poor fellow, from the too rapid assimilation of the most nutritious of beverages; he died a martyr to his faith in his own panacea. Ah, poor Adolphe, perhaps even now he may be hovering around me in the spirit; he who was once my protector in this world may have become my guardian angel in the next now he has left me. Disembodied spirits are terrible things, my dear."

"Has he given you any indication of his presence then, dear?"

"Oh, I used often to see him in my dreams, Hélène; but that was probably merely an effect of my imagination. And once I went to a Spiritualist's Séance; and the medium, a dreadful American woman, declared that poor Pichon's spirit was present. She interrogated him, and the spirit was extremely rude and irritable. He upset the furniture, and when the medium asked him about my future, and whether I should marry a second time, he declined to answer. We heard a rustling of wings, and the

medium said he had departed in indignation. The certainty that he had wings was a great consolation to me, Hélène."

And then the ladies talked *chiffons;* and they inspected the fernery, and the aviary, and the orangery; and the widow took a tender farewell of poor Adolphe's portrait in the dining-room, and then directed that he should be taken down at once, and very carefully packed, so as to be ready for the carrier in the morning. And then, after Hélène had consoled her friend, and caused her suddenly to dry her tears on the ground that it was within an hour of dinner-time, they drove back to the great house with the big *porte-cochère,* the new home which called Hélène its mistress.

CHAPTER VI.

To say that George Leigh was ambitious is a mere truism, he being a successful artist. He was hard at work upon a canvas of considerable size. It was his protest, his determined protest, against the theories and practice of his numerous rivals of the Realistic school. Ever since the Niobe had been finished young Leigh had devoted himself, when not engaged in shopping with the late Monsieur Pichon's handsome widow, to the ambitious picture which he had in hand. The subject was a hackneyed one: the scene was laid in Athens; the time chosen was the high noon of a glorious summer day; in the distance were the blue waters of the Piræus, and one saw the Grecian galleys with their purple sails skimming the sapphire waters of the sunlit sea. Upon a double hemi-cycle of glittering white marble sat the judges; no mere crowd of models carelessly daubed in, but a double rank of intellectual faces the faces of the successful, the wise, the learn and the philosophical. Each one of the judges

his characteristic trait; some were almost beautiful in their benevolent old age, each one had evidently been carefully thought out; many of the heads were palpable portraits; it was easy enough to note the leonine head of Dr. Tholozan, arrayed in the robes affected by the Cynic philosphers; the fiery eyes shaded by the shaggy grey eyebrows, the wrinkled brow, the massive chin, the thin lips and cruel teeth of the doctor, and the long sparse locks of whitening hair could not be mistaken. By his side sat a well-known dramatic critic, whose vast intellectuality blazed forth from the heavy features, the very beau ideal of the sated Epicurean; but the face was the face of Francisque Sarcey, the dramatic critic; the man whose words decided success or failure upon the Parisian stage; the writer who has made the fortune of more than one famous actress. Easily to be recognised was the republican Rochefort, whose intellectual features seemed to boil over with the concentrated venom of his soul. But for some of the heads the artist had gone far enough afield: the Emperor Justinian, from a bust in the Louvre, looked like Rhadamanthus himself; while from a dainty little sketch of a Venetian senator by Mantegna, from the same source, which he held in his left hand, the painter was transferring the portrait of one

who had been a member of the terrible Council of Three to this more ancient and classic bench of judges.

The eyes of all the judges were focussed upon one point; that is, of all save one, who protected his with his hand, as if to guard them from the sun's brightness; or more probably to protect his prudent soul from the violent appeal which was being made to his passions. The open-air court was thronged with a miscellaneous crowd of aristocrats, traders, handicraftsmen, and soldiery; among them could be distinguished the tall form of the painter Apelles, the man for whom the accused had bathed in the blue Piræan waves, that he might paint her as Venus rising from the sea. There were but two female figures besides Phryne herself present at this public triumph of matter over mind. One was represented as a young and beautiful matron of the upper class, frowning, and plucking at the little coral hand which was suspended from her neck,—the little coral hand with one finger extended, which from time immemorial has been used along the Mediterranean littoral as a charm against the evil eye. The only other woman depicted was a hideous negress arrayed in bright silken garments—an attendant upon Phryne herself—who, by her almost

repulsive ugliness, acted as a foil to the beauty of her mistress. She, with a diabolical leer on her misshapen features, was engaged in removing the thin transparent Coan robe of purple dye from the marble pavement upon which it had been cast by the triumphant and imperious beauty. Every eye was fixed upon the beautiful but shameless woman, who had publicly declared that she needed no other advocate than her own peerless charms; and every face, with the exceptions mentioned, had evidently fallen under the fatal influence of her more than human beauty.

Such was the picture.

Young Leigh tossed the little drawing he held in his hand aside, and smiled as he put the finishing touch to the last of the judges. "And now let me return to the impossible," he thought to himself. "With the figure I am more than satisfied. I don't belong to the sensuous school; why should I try to rival Courbet, or attempt to work upon the passions of the crowd? The figure is but a Venus, after all; hers are the limbs of a goddess, but she is the Goddess of Love—but the face doesn't satisfy me; and yet it is a handsome face, the face of a Phryne, a modern nineteenth-century Phryne, and it appeals but to the passions, and not to the soul. Why

should a man be his own severest critic, I wonder? I suppose it's conscience, after all. And this is the tenth fair, false face that I have patiently laboured at on this unlucky canvas; and I find myself further off than ever from the woman of my dreams, from the woman whose burning glance should enthral and subjugate an assembly of sages and philosophers such as I have striven to depict here. I need a poetic face. I've tried to idealise this one; I've tried to improve upon nature, and to turn my clay into porcelain; the result is failure. I've striven for Beauty, and I've attained Bathos." And then he put down his palette, and lighted a cigarette. "Why should this thing baffle me?" he went on to himself, "I, who have always prided myself on the rapidity of my work? Ah, when I made my Spanish tour, how well I remember how the other men used to stare at my great copies of Murillo painted in three days; and now I've been three months on the figures and background, and certainly a month more on the Phryne herself. Why, I began it when my old friend brought his young wife home, and as soon as I had done with Niobe. Poor Niobe, she's been awfully good to me; she would have made a splendid patroness, but fortunately for me I sell; and sell a great deal better than I deserve,

for the matter of that," thought the young fellow humbly. "If I were a snob, I should think, perhaps, that Madame Niobe was in love with me; not being a mangeur de cœurs, it seems to me perfectly natural that she should spend much of her time with her cousin's wife, here in this great studio. What should I do, wretch that I am, without their cheerful voices, their harmless prattle, and the inspiring sound of *her* music? Ah, her music is always well chosen. It's so spontaneous, it seems to come straight from the heart; I know it goes straight home to mine. I wonder why she married the doctor—sixty-one and nineteen? But, as my old friend says, 'the disparity will lessen year by year.' Poor thing, how beautiful she is! how different from *that!*" and he turned to the principal figure of the picture with a weary look. Then he rose, and stared at it critically.

"Go, wretch!" he said; and this time his thoughts found vent in audible speech. "Go wretch! I banish you from my memory for ever," and seizing a cloth he wiped out, with an indignant hand, the face of the beautiful Phryne. Then he gave a sigh. "Another week's hard work gone in the hopeless search after an impossible ideal. Well might Duvivier suggest that I might turn my headless figure into a

man, clasp a bearded head under his arm, alter my period and costumes, and entitle it 'St. Denis' the patron saint of Paris astonishing the Parisians of the Middle Ages. My hand must be losing its cunning. Still it is better to do one's duty; and this is the tenth impossible ogress I have turned out within the last month."

At this moment a discreet tap was heard at the door. "Come in," said the painter, and Mr. Israels, the dealer, entered the great studio.

"Hail, disinterested patron of the Arts!" cried the young man.

The Jew nodded, and walked straight up to the big canvas.

"I'm very glad you've done it," said he with a chuckle; "I'm uncommonly glad. But I'm very sorry I got here so late, for I can't see the picture. Let's have a little light upon the subject. This is the tenth time you've had that head out."

The artist stepped to a cupboard, reappeared with a long pole to which was attached a taper, and then he lighted a big brass chandelier which hung high above and in front of the canvas; behind it was a reflector, which suddenly threw a vast flood of light upon the picture.

The effect was almost magical.

"It's uncommon good," said the dealer. "That was a brilliant idea of yours, young gentleman, to use up the principal critics as your judges; they won't dare to speak ill of it lest they should be suspected of personal pique. And you've got the doctor in, too, I see. Serve him right! I say, though, hang it, you know, you might have been a little more gentle with me," said Mr. Israels, as he recognised his own unmistakable likeness in a Jew pedlar among the crowd in the background, who was being roughly pushed back by a soldier with the butt of his spear. "Well, I suppose you will have your joke; what do you want for the thing?"

"Well, the fact is, Monsieur Israels, I wasn't thinking of selling the picture."

"Oh, I know," said the dealer; "you look upon it as a masterpiece, of course—probably be bought by the nation; some great duke taken a fancy to it —I know all about it; all the good men tell me these things."

"I'm not fencing with you, Israels; I mean it for the Salon, and I shall stand or fall by the public verdict. The thing is a protest——"

"I know, I know," said the dealer. "Call it a protest, or an exposition, or a theory, or whatever you like. I don't mind confessing to you that it's

a dev'lish fine picture all the same. Right knee a little out of drawing, though. What d'you really want for it?"

"I'll tell you that, Israels, after the Salon."

"My dear boy, you know as well as I do that after the Salon the thing will be worth just six times as much as it is now, or else it will just be worth nothing at all. Now I ask you, as a man of business, did you ever know me to buy a picture *after* the Salon? I may be an ignorant man, Monsieur Leigh, but I know my business, and I'm not exactly a fool. Besides," said the dealer, with a grin, "I shall spend a pile of money on a preliminary 'blow,' and that'll be worth a good deal to you, you know. Hang it all, why, I'd contract to exhibit it in a gallery by itself for at least six months. Now what do you want for it?"

"I'm afraid we can't deal, Israels."

"Surely you don't want me to offer a price? You don't want me to buy and sell too?" said the dealer, with some indignation; "it ain't business-like, Mr. Leigh; it really ain't. In a dealer, you know, I should call such conduct downright mean."

The artist stretched out his hand to the gas-lever to turn down the light.

"Not yet," said the dealer, excitedly, "not yet."

He drew a cheque-book from his breast pocket.

"If you don't mind, Monsieur Leigh," he continued, "I think I'll sit down; and I'll tell you what I'll do," he said, with a deep sigh. "It's a very speculative and dangerous work, this Phryne of yours, Monsieur Leigh; but I'll give you twenty-five thousand francs for it, on one condition; and then I'll buy it out and out of you with all the rights, mind, and I won't even ask you to paint me out. Come now, Monsieur Leigh," he added, persuasively, "it's a big picture, but it's a big price. And I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll even pay for the frame; that'll save you a thousand francs, and you shall choose it yourself."

But the artist only shook his head.

"You don't ask what the condition is," said the dealer.

"I don't want to know it," said Leigh, "we sha'n't come to terms."

"I don't mind springing another thousand," continued the dealer, "if it's only to see the critics 'squirm,' when they see themselves in all their native ugliness, 'all of a row' at the private view."

"We'll talk about it after the Salon, Israels," said Leigh.

"Not a bit of it, my young friend; not a bit of

it. Let me tell you the condition, anyhow; it's bound to make the picture a success, and it'll send your old things up 50 per cent. Why, Madame Pichon's Niobe will be actually worth the money I sold it to her for, even in the Rue Druot. Only to think of that," said the dealer, as he raised his hands. "Now listen to me," he continued. "There's nothing like telling a man the truth at once. The fact is, that it's a fine picture; but I don't know," said Monsieur Israels, meditatively, "that I should care to spend twenty-six thousand francs on Mademoiselle Phryne; even though succeeding generations should laugh at the ridiculous caricature you've made of me in the galleries of the Louvre itself. You know the Duc de Lille?"

The painter nodded.

"You may have noticed, possibly, in the Bois, a very smart little victoria, drawn by a pair of cream-coloured Norwegian ponies; who clatter along at a tremendous rate, and whose approach is always heralded by the continuous jingle of their numerous sleigh-bells."

Again the painter nodded.

"You will allow that the lady who holds the reins is a clever whip?"

"Oh, I allow it," said Leigh, "of course she is;

it's her business. Why, it's Amenaïde of the Hippodrome."

"Quite so," replied the dealer. "She's uncommonly good-looking, isn't she?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Leigh, wearily, "in her way—in her way."

"Yes, she is good-looking," said Israels, "and she's very nearly the fashion. She wants to sit to you."

"Let her sit; you know my price. What does she want? A half-length, I suppose."

"Not a bit of it; Mademoiselle Amenaïde is ambitious; she intends that her portrait shall be the sensation of the year; that it shall be hung in the very best place of all—the place of honour in the coming Salon."

"Then I should think she will probably be disappointed, unless she could bribe the hanging committee—which would be difficult."

"You're unusually dense this afternoon, my young friend. Can't you see it all? The Duc de Lille paid for the ponies; there is no single whim of hers that he's not anxious to gratify. Now do you see why I offer you twenty-six thousand francs for that very dangerous, spiteful, and speculative picture of yours?"

"Oh, the usual reason, I suppose, Israels?"

"Mother of Moses," said the Hebrew, "he actually thinks, this good young man actually believes, that modern historical picture can possibly be worth twenty-six thousand francs to a dealer! Be calm, good young man, and don't be angry with me if I dispel your innocent illusion. The picture is finished, isn't it, all but the head? Very well, then, all you have to do is to paint in the face of Mademoiselle Amenaïde; and I'll write you a cheque now, this very instant, for twenty-six thousand francs."

The artist put out his hand to the gas-lever, and the studio was suddenly plunged into comparative darkness. "Good-night, Israels," he said, quietly, "good-night. You adjured me to be calm. I trust I am so. You probably are not aware of the enormity of your offence. You have proposed to me that I should paint a coloured advertisement of Mademoiselle Amenaïde of the Hippodrome; you've put it purely as a matter of business. Well, as a matter of business, I must decline the offer. You've paid me a good many cheques, Israels, and you've always treated me very fairly. I can't deny it. Had anybody else but you made me this flattering offer, I'd have kicked him out of the place. As it is allow me to wish you a very good evening; and permit me to

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add, Monsieur Israels, that you're a great deal uglier than I thought you. I will remedy the defects in the figure you thought so like yourself in the morning. I'll do you justice, you may rely upon it; full justice."

The artist rang the bell.

"You couldn't make me out worse than you have, Monsieur Leigh, try your hardest; unless you put in a tail. Adieu, my susceptible young friend," he added, "you'll think better of it; and when you come to my terms—as I know you will—you've only got to ask me for a cheque, and we shall be as good friends as ever. Adieu, philosopher." And Mr. Israels disappeared through the embroidered velvet portière.

George Leigh sank into a chair, and groaned in the spirit.

"That was a very bitter pill," he said to himself, "and I richly deserved it. I suppose I have quarrelled with my bread and butter. There was plenty of butter, too, about it, but it had a particularly nasty twang. If I tell the doctor, he will say I have been a fool. My predecessor here," and he looked wearily into the dim shadows of the great studio, "would have closed with the offer. What right have I to refuse it? I hate the thing; but unfortunately

I've put four months' good hard work into it, and I must stand or fall by the result. I must go on searching after the vision that persistently eludes me; and yet I have seen it somewhere in my dreams," and he gazed meditatively at the burning embers of the wood fire which was smouldering on the hearth; "but it has gone from me like the faces in the fire which we see and don't remember; like the faces in the fire which we see and then forget." He went on staring at the ashes, which gleamed a bright red in the rapidly darkening shadows, for a winter's afternoon in Paris speedily fades into night.

When a man has been standing hard at work before an easel for four mortal hours, he necessarily becomes physically weary; it is little to be wondered at that, when seated in a luxurious arm-chair in a semi-darkness, only illumined by the soft pink light of glowing embers, drowsiness should supervene. The young fellow's eyes closed, and he dropped into a profound sleep. Whether it was the pleasant glow and warmth from the fire, or the mere fact that his mind was habitually dwelling upon his picture, or the recent appearance in the flesh of the Jew pedlar, the creature of his own imagination—who can tell? But in the dream that rapidly overtook him, young Leigh actually stood in the tribunal, which for the

last four months he had been so patiently attempting to realise. He felt that he was looking on upon the scene itself, that he stood upon the warm marble pavement in the court at Athens, an interested spectator in the drama that was being played before his mental eye. It seemed to him as if he himself was actually concerned in the proceedings that were taking place, as if the centuries had rolled back, and he were a young Athenian of that fateful period. He seemed to gaze upon the double rank of judges, as if they were all his personal acquaintances. He seemed to enjoy the discomfiture of the Jew pedlar, and to resent the appeal which that much-suffering individual made to him for protection. And as his mind dwelt on the incident, an amused smile crept over the young fellow's handsome sleeping face. He seemed to hear the noise and uproar of the crowd, the hum of voices, and the martial clang of the weapons of the soldiery. And then there came a hush; and he turned, in his dream, towards the figure that formed the cynosure of every eye. And then he started, for the figure was altogether changed. The pose was the same, but the face was different; it was blushing with the real deep ingenuous blush; the eyes were cast down and shaded by their ivory lids, the sweet full lips, slightly parted, disclosed the

pearly teeth, and the long wealth of blonde dishevelled hair flowed in rich profusion over the rounded shoulders. The young fellow seemed to feel in his inmost soul a sort of mingled sensation of delight, shame, and horror. As he gazed, he seemed to experience a sudden dizziness, a choking in his throat; and gradually, little by little, the figure grew less distinct, the surging crowd seemed to struggle more wildly. In his dream he now seemed to be irresistibly impelled to address the double row of gorgeously apparelled judges; but speech was denied him, and the judges seemed by their gestures to mock at him. Then he turned once more towards the figure which had moved him so deeply; to his horror the angel-face had disappeared, and only the headless trunk, as it stood in the picture, revealed itself to his astonished eyes. Gradually it seemed to fade; the bystanders, the judges, the accessories, even the distant landscape slowly and insensibly disappeared; and George Leigh was awakened from his dream, his vision, or his nightmare—call it which you will—by a heavy hand which was placed on his shoulder.

The young artist awoke with a start.

The fire had died out, the great studio was in almost total darkness, when the dreamer was called

back suddenly from ancient Athens by the strident voice of his old friend, the doctor, as he shook him roughly by the shoulder, and said:

"Wake up, young Eutychus! A voice cries, sleep no more. Dinner's on the table, Leigh; and, thank Heaven, for once in my life I have the appetite of a hungry wolf."

"I think I've been dreaming," said Leigh, "somewhat uneasily."

"Postpone the interesting account of your visions till after dinner, my dear boy," said the doctor. "Madame Tholozan's cook is an artist with whose feelings we must not presume to trifle."

And then the two men walked out amicably side by side towards the dining-room.

CHAPTER VII.

HÉLÈNE'S DIARY.

I WISH my husband gave me a little more of his society. Nominally I get perhaps more than my fair share, for we always breakfast together at noon, after he has done with his patients; and the sounds of the wheels of his coupé are a regular dinner-bell, as they rumble through the porte-cochère at a quarter to eight. Now, at breakfast as well as at dinner, Dr. Tholozan is all that I could wish; he has always something to tell me, he doesn't direct his conversation exclusively to Monsieur Leigh; nor does he look upon me as a deaf mute; nor does he, whenever a third person is present, insist on talking, as many clever men would do, over my head, simply because I am a woman and his wife. But as surely as nine o'clock sounds, my hnsband suggests a move to the studio. I was surprised at first, I own; after a little while I ventured to remonstrate.

"My child," my husband said, "your charming sex differs from ours—you are creatures of impulse,

while we men are mere machines. What was first a habit with me, has become a necessity. While my poor brother was alive, I used to do exactly the same; after dinner we used to lounge into the studio, and he would show me his day's work; he used to get through a vast amount of work in a day, poor fellow, such as it was. And then we had our partie of tric-trac till bedtime."

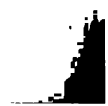
"But you don't have even that with me," I complained.

"My child," he answered, "I am aging fast. Like an old musical box, I still play the same tunes, but I run down rather quickly. But then I have provided an efficient substitute. There is Leigh, who will play to you, or sing to you, or read to you, or talk to you; and he is a far more amusing companion than I could be, my child. Then, too, I have every confidence in Leigh. I'm quite certain he would never be foolish enough to make love to you."

What could I say? On several occasions I persuaded my husband to take me into society. I suggested the opera, and I expressed a wish to go occasionally to the play. My husband never refuses to gratify these desires; but as we drive home I am often startled to see how ghastly pale he looks; and though the poor dear man never complains, I see that his

health suffers by the late hours. And now he has got into a way of excusing himself upon these occasions; and he has even insisted, that with Sophie as a chaperon, M. Leigh could well be our cavalier. We tried this arrangement, but it didn't last long. Madame Pichon, half in fun, half in earnest, simulated a sort of jealousy of me, and rendered it impossible. Oh, I do so wish that G—— (but the letter was erased, being carefully scribbled out) *M. Leigh would only like Sophie; they are suited for each other in every way, and it does make her so unhappy, poor thing. The worst of it is, that our visits to the theatre have become few and far between; and our evenings are almost always the same, and are nearly always spent at home. Since the weather has become quite cold, M. Leigh has had his little piano moved into the great recess, and we play and sing together a good deal. But I'm afraid our music is altogether wasted on my husband, who, as soon as he has inspected and criticised the work that M. Leigh has in hand, drops into the great arm-chair as a matter of course, and five minutes afterwards is inevitably fast asleep.*

Poor M. Leigh is getting demoralised, and his picture has come altogether to a standstill; it has been absolutely finished a great many times, but he is never satisfied with the head of the principal figure. I'm



getting terribly jealous of this figure, and of late the matter has seemed to prey upon the mind of our friend; he has grown dissatisfied with himself, and my husband declares that the Phryne will be his ruin. Sometimes I think that, after all, he really does care for Sophie, and that it is only her wealth that prevents his telling her so. As for Sophie, she makes violent love to him; there is no other word for it. On the last occasion of his decapitating poor Phryne, she said to him, with that delicacy which is peculiarly her own: "I have an idea, Monsieur George,"—she always addresses him so, and sometimes she forgets the Monsieur altogether—"Niobe was a success, was she not? I'll sit to you for the head, dear Monsieur George." And then he blushed to his very ears, and looked particularly foolish. "Madame," he said, with a profound bow, "I appreciate the sacrifice you would make, but the unhappy subject of the picture precludes any honest woman from figuring upon the canvas." And that effectually silenced Sophie.

Ah me! it's almost as dull here as it was at Madame Pouilly's! I even begin to look forward to the banalités of my husband's weekly dinner. He was quite right when he told me that I should receive a surfeit of compliments. The savants and professors who form the bulk of the guests—for Sophie and I

are almost always the only ladies—pay their court to both of us in a manner that is supremely ridiculous; but this is a good deal Sophie's fault, for she encourages them in a shameful manner; and they are all old enough to know better. Still, they are amusing in their way, and have a good deal to say for themselves.

George Leigh was seated on a low stool in front of his *magnum opus;* but his palette, brushes, and mahl-stick lay idly upon the table. He certainly ought to have been working, for the light was good, and it was but ten o'clock in the morning. He sat staring at the picture, and then he rose, and began to pace the studio. Ever and anon he would pause before it, but evidently his imagination failed him; for he returned to his measured step, and continued to pace the room with purposeless and weary strides, much as we see the great carnivora return to their aimless march up and down behind the bars of their den. A discreet tap was heard at the door.

"Come in," said the artist, and the doctor's parlourmaid entered the room.

"A letter, sir, from Madame Pichon," said the girl, with an impertinent smile of intelligence. "Ma-

dame's man, Monsieur Alphonse, said there was no answer."

Leigh took the letter from the salver impatiently, and thrust it into his pocket. The girl left the room with a toss of her head. As soon as she was gone, Leigh sat himself again upon the little stool, and broke the seal of the dainty epistle. As he read it his colour heightened; then he perused a newspaper cutting which it contained, sprang to his feet, seized his hat and the blackthorn stick which stood in the corner, and rushed from the room. The contents of the letter which had caused his extraordinary perturbation were as follows:—

"DEAR MONSIEUR GEORGE,—I have been expecting it all along; I knew only too well that the absurd conduct of my unfortunate cousin must culminate at last in some terrible *esclandre*. My expectations have been fulfilled. Read the enclosed cutting, which I extracted from the *Barbier* of this morning. Ah, my poor George, you and I, alas! can read between the lines. As I glanced at the hateful paragraph, the letters seemed to dance before my swimming eyes, and I can hardly hold my pen to write to you. Alas! I am the natural guardian of my poor cousin's honour. Oh that I were a man, or that poor Mon-

sieur Pichon were alive! he would know how to deal with the villain whose business it is to pander to the prurient curiosity of the Parisian public. I've all along seen how it would end. The absurd infatuation of my cousin's wife could have been no secret from either of us. Anyhow it has been plain enough to me for a considerable time. I've even felt it my duty to remonstrate with her; alas! in vain. But my soul's agony has been considerably mitigated, for I saw, dear George, that you gave her absolutely no encouragement. When a lady forgets her feelings of self-respect so far as to show a distinct partiality for any gentleman, her only hope of salvation is in the generosity of her intended victim. Come to me at once, George, for my feelings have overpowered me, and I can write no more. The enclosed explains everything. Believe me, with assurances of profound esteem,

"Your sincere and devoted friend,

"SOPHIE PICHON."

This was the cutting from the *Barbier*—

"It has been no secret in artistic circles that a young foreign artist, who has attained a not altogether unmerited success during the last few years,

has been engaged in the preparation of an ambitious work for the Salon. There has been a good deal of unnecessary mystery with reference to the subject of the picture; but this was probably a mere ruse to heighten the intended effect. The very latest intelligence was, that the work had been purchased by a well-known nobleman, an enthusiastic amateur of art, and an admirer of all that is good and beautiful. We understand, from a very excellent authority indeed, that the nobleman in question had actually purchased the picture, and, as is not infrequent in these days, at a price far higher than its intrinsic value. The work, which is an ambitious one, owed its principal, if not its only charm, to the fact of the reproduction, with a startling realism, of the portrait of Mademoiselle Amenaïde of the Hippodrome. That young lady's habitual appearance in the Bois, and her nightly successes at the Circus, have, alas! become to many of us almost a necessity of our existence. We grudge no man his triumphs. Among our Gallic artists there is no professional jealousy of the successful *insulaire*. We all know that the sons of Albion never belie their reputation as a nation of shopkeepers; but it has been the fortune of the gentleman to whom we are alluding to have been the first to introduce the

huckstering spirit into the realms of Art. We learn, with regret, that the picture was completed to the satisfaction of the noble patron, but that the artist, with a commercial genius almost diabolical in its perfidious ingenuity, sought to extract from the open-handed generosity of the nobleman—who may be termed his victim—a still richer recompense than that stipulated. With this intention he did not hesitate to threaten to remove from his picture the lovely features of Mademoiselle Amenaïde, which form the great attraction of his ambitious canvas. His patron naturally believed him incapable of so much baseness. But we learn, with regret, though without surprise, that the threat has been carried out. It is our lofty mission to hold the scale of justice with an even hand: we are ready at once to insert his *démenti,* if the artist is prepared to make one. With our usual reticence, we refrain from mentioning names; but we give all artists, native as well as foreign, a word of good advice. When they have made a bargain let them keep it; let them not attempt to advertise themselves by the habitual eccentricity of their conduct. Society, in our capital, does more than tolerate men of genius—it welcomes them with open arms. But longsuffering Paris will indignantly reject from her charmed circle a man who dares to trifle with all

that is most holy; who presumes to render venal his sacred art, or who attempts, with unpardonable presumption, to *afficher* himself at public amusements and ceremonies, by his habitual attendance upon the wives or widows of our most respectable *Bourgeoisie.* X."

* * * * *

George Leigh jumped into the first *fiacre,* and told the driver to hasten to the office of the *Barbier.* It was a sufficiently pretentious building on one of the principal boulevards. There was an immense amount of florid ornamentation about it: all the doors were of mahogany, and there was a great deal of gilding, tile work, ornamental brass and iron. Above the entrance was a little bronze statue of the historical barber. In the centre of the great hall, upon a lofty pedestal, was a life-size marble statue, representing the barber discreetly placing his finger at the side of his nose. At least half-a-dozen big files of the journal were chained to a sloping desk, and were being eagerly consulted by interested members of the Parisian public; a long counter accommodated the numerous advertisers; in one corner was the cashier's office, carefully protected by bars and wires of shining brass. Telegrams, as they

arrived, were exhibited for the convenience of the quidnuncs; and a board, with at least sixty numbers upon it, indicated the whereabouts of the various officials of the journal.

George Leigh ran his eye down the long list of names and titles—from Rédacteur-en-chef to Third Controller of the advertisements—and then he looked round him at the busy scene with an air of hopeless confusion; but the word INQUIRIES, in black letters upon a gilt plate, reassured him; he walked straight to the little counter, which was presided over by a respectable old gentleman, whose coat-cuffs were protected by black linen sleeves which reached to his elbows.

"Will you oblige me, sir," he said, politely, "with the address of a correspondent who signs himself X.?"

The old gentleman smiled, and then he shrugged his shoulders almost to his ears.

"My dear sir," he said, "there are so many of them. It is the commonest of all initials used by anonymous contributors."

Young Leigh drew from his pocket the cutting from the morning's *Barbier*.

"I should like to have a few moment's conversation with the author of this," he said, quietly.

The old gentleman adjusted his spectacles, and carefully perused the paragraph. Then he smiled blandly.

"Has Monsieur his visiting card about him?" he said.

"Certainly," said Leigh, as he handed him one.

The old gentleman scrutinised the card, gave another bland little smile, and said softly:

"And Monsieur considers himself aggrieved?"

"Naturally," said Leigh. "Naturally."

"Ah, in that case," said the old gentleman, "you had better see our Monsieur Laguerre."

"May I ask," said Leigh, "does Monsieur Laguerre accept the responsibility of the paragraph?"

"Oh, by no means, dear sir, by no means. But he will be able to give you information, possibly. In fact, monsieur, your business can only be arranged through his intervention; that is, if you consider yourself an injured party; though, for my part, monsieur, were I you, I should take the common-sense view, and look upon the paragraph as an excellent and gratuitous advertisement," and he made Leigh a little bow.

"I am afraid I must ask for an interview with Monsieur Laguerre, all the same," said Leigh, and his fingers grasped very tightly indeed the

tough little blackthorn stick which he held in his hand.

"Certainly, my dear sir, certainly," said the old gentleman. "The staff of this journal is ever at the disposition of the public," and then he stepped back, and whistled up a tube; then he spoke through it, and placed his ear to it to receive the answer. "Our Monsieur Laguerre," he said, "will be delighted to receive you, sir." He struck a hand-bell, and a magnificently attired footman—who looked more like the Suisse of some cathedral than an ordinary domestic—immediately presented himself. The old gentleman handed the card to the man. "This gentleman desires to see Captain Laguerre," he said.

"Be kind enough to follow me, sir," said the footman, and his face wore a look of discreet amusement.

Leigh followed the man to the second floor of the vast building; the footman tapped at a door, and a heavy bass voice directed him to enter.

"Mr. Leigh, to see Captain Laguerre," he said, and retired immediately.

Captain Laguerre rose from his chair by the fire, and politely motioned his visitor to a seat.

He was a sufficiently truculent individual; his

red hair was cut short upon his head like a brush, as is the manner of French cavalry officers; he stood about six feet two, and in face and appearance he looked what he was, the bully, or bulldog, of the establishment.

"Monsieur George Leigh, I believe," said he, as he perused the card. "I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance. Be good enough to proceed with your business, sir; always remembering that my time, which is the property of the journal, is excessively valuable." And then he gave a great grin, which showed a double row of strong white teeth, and he looked more like a bulldog than ever.

George Leigh took a seat.

"Captain Laguerre," he said politely, "I have been recommended to address myself to you to obtain the information which I desire. Will you kindly place me in communication with the person signing himself X., the author of this paragraph," and he handed him the cutting, "which is personally offensive to me?"

Captain Laguerre laughed a great horse-laugh. "My good sir," he said, "you are evidently not a literary man, or you would know that a journal such as ours never gives up the names of its anonymous correspondents. It prefers rather to accept the

responsiblity. May I ask in what way you are aggrieved, Monsieur Leigh?"

"The entire paragraph, Captain Laguerre, is a tissue of abominable falsehoods and fabrications. I have made no contract with any nobleman to sell my picture; I have never painted in it the portrait of Mademoiselle Amenaïde, who is personally unknown to me. Statements such as these are as injurious to me as they are false; I would have treated them with the contempt they deserve but for the abominable calumny contained in the last sentence of the paragraph."

"Quite so, Monsieur Leigh, quite so," replied the other; "the editor will be only too delighted to receive your denials; it will add a piquancy, a flavour, to the whole affair. Or, should you prefer it, you have your remedy in the law courts. My proprietors are wealthy, Monsieur Leigh," he continued with a smile.

"There is a third course, I think," said Leigh, quietly; "some one will, I suppose, undertake the responsibility of the paragraph?"

"Sir," said Captain Laguerre, very solemnly, as he pulled up his shirt collar, "I presume you allude to an appeal to physical force?"

Leigh nodded.

"In that case, Monsieur Leigh, it is as well that the rest of our interview should take place in the presence of a witness."

"As you please," said Leigh, wearily, and he grasped his stick all the tighter.

Captain Laguerre rose, opened the door which communicated with the adjoining apartment, and said mechanically, "Would you mind stepping in here a minute, Duvivier?"

A gentleman at once entered the room, and to Leigh's astonishment he recognised his old friend, the dramatist. The two young men shook hands.

"You've come about that miserable paragraph, I suppose," said Duvivier. "My dear boy," he continued, in English, "I can see you have every intention of making a row. Don't be an idiot. Haven't you the sense to see that our muscular friend is but a paid assassin, a mere hired bravo, who draws a weekly salary to represent brute force? If you attempt to horsewhip the journal in his person, you are bound to get the worst of it; and he will spit you, or shoot you afterwards, without the smallest compunction."

"I'm quite indifferent to that," said Leigh, doggedly.

"Quite so, quite so. But, unfortunately, so is he; that is his *raison d'être*. I've read the miserable

paragraph; be guided by me, my dear fellow, don't fight with a woman. You must see, if you reflect coolly, the hand of Mademoiselle Amenaïde in this wretched affair. Take my advice, don't touch pitch. I will see that the whole thing is contradicted in the next edition. If you proceed to violence—as is but natural—you would be merely selling the paper for the next month, and the verdict of the public would be, 'No smoke without fire!' You'll excuse us, Laguerre," continued Duvivier, returning once more to his native tongue, "Monsieur Leigh is a personal friend of mine, and I've been telling him he'll only make himself ridiculous, and damage his own cause, by a resort to violence."

"Settle it between you, gentlemen," said the captain. "It's a matter of indifference to me."

"I've gone too far to draw back now," said Leigh to his friend.

Duvivier placed his hand upon his shoulder. "Have you counted the cost, Leigh?" he asked, solemnly; "the cost to her? You and I, my friend, can see the sting of the innuendo; but few beside ourselves, fortunately for us and for her, can read the riddle it contains. Come and breakfast with me, George."

Leigh saw the force of his friend's argument; there was no resisting it.

"Captain Laguerre," he said, with formal politeness, "I regret having trespassed upon your valuable time; my inexperience is my only excuse. I will detain you no longer, and with your permission I will take my leave."

Captain Laguerre sighed, and bowed mechanically, and the two friends quitted the lion's den.

They breakfasted together; but Leigh fought very shy, indeed, of the subject of his relations with the ladies of Dr. Tholozan's family.

"You were always a silent fellow, Leigh," said his friend. "Still waters run deep. Ah, my boy," he continued, "if you'd only been a Frenchman you would have told me all about it, long ago. Anyhow," said he, as he shook his friend's hand at parting, "I'll see that it's contradicted authoritatively. You may trust me to do that."

Duvivier was as good as his word. The following appeared in the second edition of the *Barbier*, and in the succeeding day's issue of the journal:—

"We have the highest authority for stating that the paragraph signed X. in our issue of the morning was an impudent hoax. The talented young artist who was alluded to has informed us that the state-

ments with regard to Mademoiselle Amenaïde were entirely without foundation. We are much gratified to receive from him this categorical denial; and regret extremely any annoyance we may have unwittingly occasioned him."

And then the matter dropped.

That night the little quartette, in the big recess by the studio fire, talked the whole thing over. Madame Pichon expressed her indignation, but the doctor laughed at the affair as unworthy of notice.

"Play to us, Hélène," he said; "let us think of it no more, it isn't worth talking about; though one thing seems quite certain to me, Leigh," he added: "you may depend upon it that it was merely a manœuvre of that little rascal Israels, after all."

Probably the doctor was right.

CHAPTER VIII.

HÉLÈNE'S DIARY.

I DON'T know why Sophie is still so very angry with George about the newspaper paragraph. It was but a tissue of absurdities from first to last; and why poor George should be accused of making himself conspicuous because he is good-natured enough to act as our cavalier, I cannot understand. It would be very much nicer if he were married to Sophie, after all; for then there would be no impropriety in my thinking of him as George, as I find I have done inadvertently within the three last minutes. It was only this morning that I said to Felix, "Monsieur Leigh seems to find it difficult to make up his mind." "Madame Pichon has no trouble on that subject," said he; "but I think my young friend is finding attractions elsewhere."

"Oh, Felix!" I cried—for I was indignant at such a suspicion—"why, he never even goes into society."

"My dear child," said my husband, "that is

but natural, if the attraction is at home." I didn't see his meaning at first.

"It isn't kind to tease me, Felix," I said, when I understood the innuendo.

"My child, it is the most natural thing in life," my husband answered, "and one of the commonest. When an old fool," he went on, "that's me—commits the indiscretion of forming a marriage with a young and beautiful woman—that's you," he said, with a little bow—"all his male friends—be they young, old, or middle-aged—are seized with a sudden sympathetic compassion for the victim. Pity, my child, you know, is akin to love. Doubtless Monsieur Leigh loves you, Hélène. Anyhow, I know he pities you."

"Felix," I said, and I was getting angry, "your badinage is in bad taste; at least, it seems so to me."

"My child," he replied, "I am far from joking. I don't remember that I ever joked in my life. I repeat, Hélène: young Leigh loves you. And where's the harm? You, too, my child, in your way—you, too, I think, love him a little." And he looked into my eyes in a way that seemed to fascinate me, and then he took my hand. "What is more natural? Here are two young people thrown together by force

of circumstances, and by no fault of their own; the man is romantic, handsome—an artist openly searching for an ideal. Is it strange, is it to be wondered at, if he should find that ideal in the lovely young wife of his old friend? And why should the husband object? The man he knows to be the soul of honour; he knows the woman would not wrong him. My child, the old fool trusts his wife and his friend; the confidence of silly old fellows such as he is surprising; it becomes almost touching at times, does it not, my child?" I burst into tears.

"Don't weep, Hélène," he said, kindly; "you have nothing to weep for, or to be ashamed of, but you have everything to hope. I am but your husband in name, Hélène; and you won't have long to wait. My experience has told me what your innocent eyes, my child, have failed to see. George Leigh loves you far more than he loves his art; and I say again, what is more natural? and again I ask, where's the harm?" Then I became really angry.

"Dr. Tholozan," I said, "this passes all bounds. You have ceased to respect me when you deliberately hold me up to ridicule."

"My child, I do more than respect you; I love you with the fond and ever watchful affection—of a father. You and Leigh will yet be happy. I pray

to God it may be soon." And then he pressed his hand upon his heart, turned ghastly pale, and hurriedly left the room.

The extraordinary communication which my husband has made to me has upset me altogether. Never have I so much as suspected Mr. Leigh of feeling the slightest partiality for me; still less have I had the slightest reason to doubt myself. I have liked Monsieur Leigh, it is true; but then everybody likes him; and I have sympathised with Sophie, I have wished —I have honestly wished—that they might be happy in each other's love. Is not that sufficient proof? What woman, with even a penchant for any man, could desire to see him happily married to another? It isn't reasonable; it isn't even possible. George, too, is the soul of honour; were he thinking of me with any other feeling but one of simple kindness, he is far too honest a man to expose himself to temptation. And yet my husband wasn't joking! I feel that he meant every word he said. Why did he tell me that he—that I—that we—should not have long to wait? Can it be possible that, knowing he is not long for this world, he has merely given me his name in order to provide for his old friend's daughter? Can he have done this thing deliberately, and calmly? For Felix is no man of impulse. Or has he of set

purpose planned for me this terrible ordeal, as a mere trial, as a snare? I have not knowingly offended him.

Why did my husband tell me this?

He has destroyed my peace of mind. I feel as one who is compelled to walk on the brink of a terrible precipice. God guard my trembling feet!

Pretty Madame Pichon entered the studio that morning as was her custom. She felt herself at home there. Why should she stand on any ceremony in her own cousin's house?

"You haven't got on a bit, George," she said; "not a bit."

"No, Madame Pichon," he replied. "I've come to a dead lock. There's always some thing happening to upset my ideas; I'm perpetually annoyed by some disturbing influence or other."

"Do you mean that you want to be alone, George?" said Madame Pichon, plaintively.

What could the poor young fellow say?

"Far from it," he replied; "but I fear I am a very poor companion. I'm dull and distrait, and my imagination fails me. A sort of blight seems to have come upon me."

"You take things too seriously," said the lady,

with a sigh, as she dropped into a chair; "I have suffered myself," she continued, in a semi-tragic voice, "more than most women, but I grin and bear it; and I try to make the grin, Monsieur Leigh, as becoming as possible. You are getting morbid, George," she said. "You've done nothing but rub out the head of that principal figure of yours one day, and put in a fresh one the next, for the last month. But I'm not surprised at that, after all," she said, with a meditative purr, "your Niobe was your masterpiece. Don't you think so?" And then the widow turned her head away, and blushed violently.

"Yes, in a way," he said, carelessly, "in a way, I suppose it was. It was a success as a portrait, you know; but this is a more ambitious work. I began it *con amore*, and now I've come to a dead lock, and I hate the sight of it."

"And didn't you paint the Niobe *con amore?*" said Madame Pichon; and her little foot began to tap impatiently, as she awaited his answer.

"Madame," said the artist, with a bow, "that was a work of pleasure, this is a more serious matter. I have attempted a lofti
and I have failed; I own it, I
failed."

"Are you quite sure I don't interrupt you, Monsieur Leigh?" said the widow. "Quite, quite sure?"

"Far from it, madame; I am so used to your daily presence here, that I don't know what I should do without your liberal criticism and good-humoured praise."

"Then I shall stay here," said Madame Pichon. "George," she asked, "shall I play to you?"

"Madame Pichon is only too indulgent to my weaknesses," he said, with a bow.

"Then don't mind me. Stay where you are," she said, "I wouldn't have you quit your easel, even for an instant; though I know you are going to offer to open the piano for me."

Madame Pichon removed the elaborate structure which Celestine called a *chapeau à la villageoise,* then she took off her gloves with some difficulty; she opened the piano, and then she began to play. She played without soul, but she played brilliantly, all the same. She did her very best to cheer the artist; and there was nothing melancholy or romantic in the choice of any of her pieces—pieces which she literally fired off, one after another, in a florid but effective style. She kept her word: she didn't speak, but went on playing steadily, and in five

minutes George Leigh had ceased to be aware of her very existence.

Suddenly he took a bit of pointed charcoal, and sketched in the face of the hitherto headless figure of Phryne with feverish rapidity. Then he began to work upon it with his brushes; occasionally stepping back a pace or two to watch the effect. Still Madame Pichon played on; and as ever and anon she looked at the young fellow over her shoulder, and saw that he was hard at work, a smile of pleasure stole over her soft features, and a look of triumph sparkled in her handsome eyes. Leigh worked on with the rapidity which was habitual with him; gradually the face grew under his creative fingers, and gradually a likeness became more and more apparent; the big blue eyes of the face he was creating looked at the painter with a loving gaze; streams of waving blonde hair now began to fall in luxuriant ringlets over the shoulder of the Phryne; the slightly parted lips disclosed the pearl-like teeth in the soft habitual smile, which was a second nature to Dr. Tholozan's wife.

The face was the face of a lovely woman; indeed, it was the face of an angel. But it was not the face of a Phryne.

Still Madame Pichon continued to pour forth her

flood of merry melody from the artist's piano, and still George Leigh continued to work with a rapid and skilful hand upon the face that grew under his deft fingers. He stepped back for the last time, he advanced once more, and with one loving touch indicated a tiny dimple upon Phryne's cheek. Then he placed his palette upon the table with a satisfied air, kissed his finger tips to the charming creation of his memory and imagination, and flung himself into a big arm-chair. Just then the music ended with a triumphant crash. George Leigh was suddenly transported from the realms of imagination, and awoke to the realities of life, and the presence of Madame Sophie Pichon in the flesh.

There was very little tragedy about pretty Madame Pichon; but if ever she looked like a tragedy queen, and really in a good natural wholesome rage, she looked so now.

"George," she said, in a sepulchral voice—and she clenched her chubby little hands in impotent fury—"George!" she repeated, in a shriller tone, and she stamped in her anger.

The painter turned to her with a weary look.

"Have you no shame, Monsieur Leigh?" said the widow, indignantly; "don't you know that your heartless wickedness is sufficient to compromise my

cousin's wife? Can't you see that, her husband's suspicions once aroused, the happiness of their married life would be for ever ruined? Don't look at the picture in that irritating manner, George. I have long expected it; but I steeled my heart. George Leigh, you are a false, faithless, fickle man! You have been trifling with me, and now you are about to seek a fresh victim. You are about to attempt to ensnare the affections of the inexperienced girl whom my cousin—who is old enough to have known better—has been sufficiently infatuated with to have made his wife. Never till this moment have I felt so much the want of a natural protector; never till now have I realised what it is to be utterly friendless. Oh, George, would that the late Monsieur Pichon were alive!" and she laughed hysterically, and flung herself into the astonished painter's arms.

What was the poor young man to do? Madame Pichon was looking up into his face with streaming eyes, and she laughed a succession of horrid, hard, unnatural laughs that astonished, and, at the same time, frightened the young man. He couldn't ring for assistance, for Madame Pichon was clutching his arms very tightly indeed. He had vague ideas about burnt feathers, the cutting of stay-laces, and the slapping of hands; and never having seen a

lady hysterically sobbing before he was honestly frightened.

"Oh, George, George, George!" gasped Madame Pichon; and still continuing to clutch his arms, she buried her face in his bosom.

The *portière* was raised, and Dr. Tholozan, who advanced with noiseless strides over the thick Turkey carpet, entered the studio. It is rather a trying thing for any man to enter a room suddenly and unannounced, and to find it occupied by a gentleman and lady in *tête-à-tête*—the gentleman looking particularly foolish, and the lady's countenance altogether hidden from view upon his breast.

"Pardon me, my dear good young people," he said, and at the unexpected sound of his voice Madame Pichon gave a little scream, flung herself into the artist's easy-chair, and buried her face in her hands.

"Well, my dear Sophie," he continued, "you told me once there was nothing you wouldn't do for Art's sake, and upon my word I'm inclined to believe you. I hope you will both pardon the intrusion."

"Stay, Felix," cried Madame Pichon, as she sprang to her feet. "Disabuse yourself of the idea that there is anything between Monsieur Leigh and

myself; if ever any such phantasy existed between us, it is over now for ever. You may laugh, Felix," she added, "but you will need all your sang-froid, even if your mind does not give way at once under the blow. Look there!" she said, theatrically—and she pointed suddenly to the picture with a tragic air—"that, Felix, that will explain everything!"

Dr. Tholozan turned his eyes towards the picture, and his great forehead flushed. He didn't speak at first.

"It's a little flattered, Leigh," he said, after a pause, carelessly. "Yes, I think it really is a little flattered. You do my poor family too much honour, Leigh," said the doctor, coldly. "If you wished to surprise me by an artistic joke, you have succeeded. After all, it is but a joke; not in the best taste, perhaps, but still a joke." Dr. Tholozan had apparently regained his insouciance; but young Leigh, who knew him well, saw that the calmness of his face was merely a mask to conceal his real emotion, for his eyes still sparkled like coals of fire.

Leigh was not deceived. The cold-blooded doctor, ever a suspicious man, was evidently bitterly offended. What would the doctor think? What would he suspect? With a hollow laugh, and with unshaking hand, Leigh took a sponge, and in an in-

stant wiped away the charming dream-face that had formed the climax of his work.

"I think," said he, with a forced smile, "that Madame's features make my thirtieth unsuccessful attempt at the face of the beautiful Greek."

"Ah, *mon ami,* it is a pity," said Dr. Tholozan. "I regret that you should have deprived us, and the world, of so startling a token of your—hum—appreciation of my wife's charms. But, after all, I think, it was a foolish act."

"Forgive me, my old friend," said Leigh, offering his hand. "I plead guilty to bad taste, I acknowledge a foolish indiscretion; but half the prettiest women in Paris have figured upon this canvas."

"And will figure yet again, my friend, I fear, before you are satisfied," said the doctor with a smile, as he took the artist's hand. "But where is Sophie? She has disappeared like the unsubstantial pageant of a vision faded. Were it not for her hat and gloves I should have doubted the evidence of my senses. Anyhow, she has effected a sudden retreat without beat of drum or sound of trumpet. George, my boy," he added, meaningly, "you've a great deal to answer for." And then he left the room.

"I must have been mad," said Leigh to himself, as he sank into his chair once more, and stared dis-

consolately at the headless figure of Phryne. "I have committed an indiscretion for which there is no excuse, no palliation; an indiscretion which my old friend will never forgive. I forgot that I was not alone. And what could Madame Pichon have meant by the ridiculous scene she made? Can it be that she was simply furiously angry—with a woman's senseless unreasoning jealousy—at the realisation of the fact that her simple good looks paled before the transcendent beauty of her cousin's wife? It must be that, for the only other possible interpretation of her conduct would be that she does me the honour to make love to me; and I have hardly sufficient self-conceit to suspect that. What did the doctor mean by saying that I had much to answer for? Can it be possible," thought the young man to himself, "that I have been sufficiently base, mean enough, and dishonourable enough, to fall in love (hateful phrase!) with my old friend's young wife? Great heavens! let me banish the horrible suspicion at once!" And he shuddered involuntarily. "Ah, me! but I fear it is so, though; and that only now have I become alive to the depth of my own degradation. Miserable fool that I have been! I must go from this place which has been so long my home; tear myself from these associations, so delightful, but

at the same time so dangerous. And what reason can I give the doctor? I'll be honest with him, and I'll tell him everything. How can I stay here, getting day by day deeper and deeper in the mire? for I do love her. Yes, I do love the very ground she walks upon. Alas! I have loved her since the moment when my old friend, in his honest confidence, triumphantly exhibited her likeness to me. Why did he tell me to keep it? Will her glorious eyes—though I should flee from her delicious presence—ever cease to trouble my tortured heart? Ah! it has been a delightful dream, and it is a rude awakening. But I'll be honest, and I'll tear myself away. She shall never know that I have dared to love her. What will she think of me when she hears—as hear she will—that I have dared to desecrate her angel face by depicting it on a canvas such as this? Brute, beast that I was!"

Just then there came a tap at the door.

"Come in," said the painter, in an irritated tone, "come in," and Madame Pichon's pert little Abigail entered the room.

"I've come to get Madame's hat and gloves, sir," said the girl, with a knowing look. "She's very ill, my poor lady, sir," continued the maid, as she adjusted her cuffs.

"I hope it's nothing serious, Francine," said the artist, who felt compelled to say something.

"Oh, she's been very bad, sir," said the girl; "she's a very good-natured lady, sir, ordinarily; but when I asked her if there was anything I could do for her she threatened to box my ears, and she looked as if she meant it too, sir, for the matter of that. And she left me a message, sir, for you. I was to say, sir, that she was far too upset to stay to dinner. I can't think what has come to her; I can't, indeed. Poor lady, she looked quite broken-hearted."

CHAPTER IX.

For three whole days Madame Pichon had not appeared at her cousin's house; and it must be confessed that the huge place grew a trifle gloomy to the painter, as well as to the doctor and his wife. Leigh was silent, and apparently depressed; he avoided Dr. Tholozan's eye, and when their looks did meet, the doctor's thin lips would quiver with suppressed amusement, and young Leigh would blush to his ears. Each day at dinner-time Dr. Tholozan's wife anxiously inquired after the young widow; each day the answer was the same.

"My child, she is overwrought and nervous. No, it's no use your going to see her, for she denies herself to everybody, and she persists in thinking herself ill."

"But you say she keeps her bed, Felix?"

"No, I don't think I should call it keeping her bed, my child; it isn't exactly that. She lies in state, as it were; she has got her drawing-room darkened, and she receives me extended full length

upon a sofa, from which she does not deign to rise. There she holds a sort of *lit de justice.* At first she groans, she sighs, and she talks about the late Monsieur Pichon; and she looks more like Niobe than ever; she even hints at getting back her late husband's portrait from Pichonville: that's a bad symptom. To-day she asked me if I should be surprised if she took to religion, and became a Little Sister of the Poor. But when I told her that she would have to wear the dress—which is not a becoming one—she seemed to think better of it. If I didn't know Sophie as well as I do, I should think she was getting morbid, for the table at her side was covered with religious books. As it is, I know she is only posing; for I saw a fat yellow-covered novel sticking out from under her pillow. I don't think she'll stay away long, you know; for she insists on my stopping with her at least an hour, and she manifests a discreet interest in all three of us."

"I shall go to her to-morrow, Felix," said Madame Tholozan with determination.

"I doubt her consenting to see you, my child. She declares herself *en retraite.*"

"There's no reason why she shouldn't see me. I haven't offended her in any way; and when the mountain wouldn't come to Mahomet, you remember

that he cast ceremony aside and called first. It can't go on, you know, Felix; it's so dull for me to be alone all day; and she must feel it dull, too, in that great house all alone by herself. I shall certainly go and see her to-morrow, and if she denies herself, I shall force my way in."

Dr. Tholozan made no reply; and a silence of considerable length ensued, which was only broken by the ticking of the big Louis Quinze clock. At length the doctor, who appeared to have sunk into a semi-doze before the fire, opened his eyes, and, turning to the artist, said:

"Has it dawned upon you, my young friend, that you have got just eight days left to finish your picture? If I'm not mistaken, it has to be sent in this day week. You'll have to close with Mademoiselle Amenaïde, after all, Leigh," and the doctor chuckled.

"No," said Leigh, "I have managed to avoid that. I'm getting on with the head, at last."

"What, another portrait, Leigh?" said the doctor; "another portrait, eh?"

The artist blushed. "I'm going to cut the knot as did the wily Greek of old. No more portraits for me, no more ideal faces. I am now carrying out an ingenious American idea. The face is a com-

position. It's a splendid plan, you know, in theory. Your American photographer gets twenty wise men and twenty beautiful women; he photographs them, and by taking a little of each, and combining them all, he is supposed to produce a portrait of the typical Sage and the typical Beauty. Oh, I'm hard at it now; it smells rather of the base mechanical, but needs must, you see, doctor, when the devil drives; and, as you say, I have but a week before me."

"You're joking, Leigh," said Dr. Tholozan.

"Not a bit of it," replied the painter, "it's sad and solemn earnest. In a couple of days I shall have finished the head; and then the wicked critics may work their will upon me as soon as they are ready to begin. And I shall be very glad, indeed, when it's all over, for it's knocking me up. I'm getting morose and irritable; in fact, I think I'm getting ill; and in my case it's not posing for my appetite has failed me, I cannot sleep, and I am always feverish and out of sorts."

"You should try change of air and scene for a while," remarked the doctor, with meaning.

"Yes," said the artist, "that's exactly what I intend to do. A run to the sea or the mountains will do me good. I've toiled away in this studio for so

long, that I'm getting what the gardeners call pot-bound. Ah!" cried the young fellow, as if in pain, and he clapped his hand to his left shoulder. "I can't make it out," he added, apologetically; "I've had these twinges all day long. I'm out of sorts, old friend. With Madame's permission, I think I will retire," and bidding the doctor and his wife good-night the artist left the studio.

"Is poor Monsieur George really ill, Felix?" said Madame Tholozan.

"I fear he's in for an attack of rheumatic fever, my child."

"And this disorder, is it dangerous, Felix?"

"At times, yes. It'll mean six weeks in bed, at any rate. But he is a young and healthy fellow; there won't be much danger," said the doctor, "unless the heart is affected—unless the heart is affected."

"Poor Monsieur George!" murmured Madame Tholozan innocently, as she gazed into the smouldering fire of wood.

"You'll have to nurse him, Hélène," said Dr. Tholozan; "we can't leave the poor fellow to the tender mercies of a hired nurse."

And then Madame Tholozan flushed a little. "I will nurse him, Felix," she said, "if you think it

right. But perhaps you are mistaken. Let us hope so."

"No, I'm not mistaken, Hélène. The determination to finish this unlucky picture of his has, till now, kept him out of bed, where by rights he ought to be; that same determination may keep him going to-morrow, but after that he will break down utterly, and you and Sophie will have your hands full. It's a curious thing, Hélène," the doctor continued, "but as yet I haven't seen this new departure of Leigh's. Let us come and have a look at it."

The doctor took the long lighting-rod from its cupboard, turned the gas lever, and, with dexterous hand, applied a light to the big gasalier. The great picture sprang into view in an instant.

With the exception of the head of the principal figure it was unchanged. Madame Tholozan, as she leant on her husband's arm in the semi-obscurity of the great studio, stood and gazed at it in silence. "It's a very beautiful face," she said, slowly. "Yes," she repeated, "the face is a success. It's a refined face."

"It's clever, that's undeniable," said the doctor; "and it's certainly not the face of mademoiselle Amenaïde, for there's nothing vulgar or venal about

it; but he's had a more beautiful face than that upon his canvas."

"No, Felix, not more beautiful: this is very lovely."

"She does not know, then, of our young friend's indiscretion," thought the doctor.

"Well, at all events to my mind, Hélène, one at least of its predecessors surpassed it. But by this face he'll have to stand or fall. It's evidently a composition, this, as he says. It'll be a pleasant surprise for Sophie, at any rate. Do you know, Hélène, that Sophie actually offered to sit for the head?"

"She said it, but she couldn't have meant it, Felix."

"Oh, I don't know; there is no end to Sophie's obliging good nature. It wouldn't have surprised me if she had offered to pose for the figure. Ay, and done it, too," said the doctor, "'for the sake of Art,' as she would put it."

"Oh, Felix, you're too hard on her."

"I don't think either you or I, Hélène, would care to see the face of one we love occupying the principal position on such a canvas as this?"

"No, indeed, Felix; it would be too horrible."

"My child, most of our fair Parisians would con-

sider it a high honour. They would be delighted at so signal a recognition of their charms, from so successful a man as our young friend; and they would don their most elaborate costume, and pose at the private view, lest the public of the world's capital should fail to be alive to the fact."

"No, Felix; no. You judge us too harshly. As for Monsieur Leigh, his own good sense would preserve him against such an abominable piece of wickedness."

The doctor laughed. "Leigh is but like the rest of them, my child—artists have no shame."

"No woman," retorted Madame Tholozan, "who deserved the name, or who had the least trace of self-respect, would forgive the man who was guilty of such an act."

"Little Puritan," said the doctor, and he kissed his young wife, "who knows, you may be right after all?" And then he turned the gas out.

Dr. Tholozan was a man of honour. He paid his tradespeople; he would have scorned to take a mean advantage of any man; nothing would have induced him to open a letter which did not belong to him. But, alas! he had the instinct of his profession, and he looked upon his young wife as a psychological study. It pleased him to read her

soul as he would read an open book. To most of us, the means he adopted to do this would appear base; to him they seemed but natural. We must remember that he was a scientific man, an old man, a married man, and a Frenchman.

He sat for some half an hour after his wife had retired, meditating before the fire in the cosy recess of the great studio; and then he got up, lighted his bedroom candle, extinguished the lamp, and walked straight to his wife's boudoir. With a key which was attached to his watch-chain he opened her little escritoire, and he took from it his wife's diary, and calmly perused its latest entries. He replaced the book with a smile, re-locked the escritoire, and then retired to rest, perfectly satisfied with himself and the world in general.

* * * * *

It's all very well to take to one's bed in a huff. Having announced one's intentions, there is a certain sort of solemnity in the act itself. It's easy enough to go to bed, the difficulty is to remain there. Madame Pichon's indignation was still red-hot, but, alas! so were her jealousy and her curiosity; and she became suddenly awakened to the fact that though she might be punishing the gentleman by her continued

absence—the man who had the bad taste to choose her cousin's wife as his model in preference to herself—yet by her sudden retreat she felt she was but acknowledging her own defeat. What opportunities for stolen greetings, what chances of unforeseen rencontres and impromptu meetings, rendered possibly more dangerous by the additional chance of their being *tête-à-tête!* Madame Pichon was considerably exercised in her mind as to whether she would not be pursuing a wiser policy by reappearing once more upon the field. "Out of sight, out of mind," is a well-known proverb. Somehow or other it singularly commended itself to the young widow just then. She had returned no answer to several little notes of inquiry which she had received from the doctor's wife. Determined as she had been that she would deny herself to the lady whom she looked upon as an unprincipled and successful rival, she now suddenly changed her tactics. She rang her bell sharply, and her maid appeared.

"Francine," she said, "I'm feeling better this morning. Should Madame Tholozan call, as she very possibly may, I shall be pleased to see her."

The woman manifested no surprise, though but a short half-hour before Madame Pichon had expressed her absolute determination to see no one but

her cousin; who, of course, came in his professional capacity.

"Give me a hand-glass, Francine," said Madame Pichon. She carefully examined her features in the mirror, and then she came to a sudden decision. Like the great Napoleon, Madame Pichon's strategy was directed by flashes of genius.

"I shall get up at once, Francine," she said; and she proceeded to do so. Her toilet was a rather long process, and the maid found her mistress unusually difficult to please that morning. She accused the maid of "tugging" at her hair; her complaints were many, and she was very exacting. When the entire process was complete she declared herself to be frightful, and pale as a ghost.

"Ah, Madame," said the girl, sympathisingly, "Madame's illness has made terrible ravages. I trust Madame will not be displeased if I suggest a suspicion—the very slightest suspicion—of artificial colour to her cheeks."

"Francine, if I were not so weak," said Madame Pichon, solemnly, "I would box your ears for daring to hint such a thing."

"My late mistress——" began the maid, apologetically.

"Your late mistress was forty, if she was a

day!" almost screamed the indignant invalid. "No; I will do better than that: give me the rose-coloured tea-gown."

The order was obeyed, and Madame Pichon, having put on the dress, surveyed herself at all points in the great cheval glass. She was satisfied; she felt that she was an adversary not to be despised, even by her cousin's beautiful wife. And she was quite right, for the pink became her, a flush of pleasure lighted up her cheek, and with a firm step she walked down to her boudoir to await the arrival of Madame Tholozan.

Nor was she disappointed. That lady shortly afterwards entered the room, seized both Madame Pichon's hands, and would have embraced her; but the widow kept her at arm's length, and declined the proffered salute. Then she sank back once more into the pillowed lounge seat from which she had not risen, and applied a filmy lace handkerchief to her eyes.

"You've come to triumph over me, Hélène, I suppose," she said, solemnly.

"Don't be tragic, Sophie; there need be no acting between us two. No, dear," she went on, "I have come to sympathise with you. When you never answered my notes I became alarmed, ti

Felix reassured me. What has been the matter, Sophie dear?"

"And you can sit there, Hélène, and have the effrontery to ask me this?" said Madame Pichon. "Your machinations have proved successful, Hélène. Why did you come between us to take his affections from me? I know everything," the widow continued, in a bitter tone. "If it hadn't been for my loyalty to you I should have told Felix all."

"I don't understand you, Sophie. I have been guilty of no treachery to you, and have done nothing to offend you knowingly. Why are you so strange? How have I hurt you? Tell me, I beg."

"Hélène, you're a hypocrite—a wicked, base, designing hypocrite. Why you persist in misunderstanding me, I cannot tell. I speak plainly enough. Knowing, as you know, the position in which George and I stood to one another; knowing that we were lovers—though not affianced lovers—why have you abused your position as my cousin's wife to dazzle him with your younger and fresher beauty? Why have you taken his fickle heart from me? Why have you robbed me of what once, alas, was mine—I mean his honest love? It was base enough of you, if you love him as I believe you do; still more wicked, if it was only for the sake of a

miserable flirtation. You have succeeded in your wickedness only too well. I, who once inspired his genius, and reigned without a rival in his heart, find myself now cast aside as a plaything which has ceased to please. And why, forsooth? In order that my cousin's wife should amuse herself!"

"Sophie, I think you must be mad. Your jealousy is ludicrous and absurd."

"Oh, of course I'm ludicrous and absurd in your eyes, Hélène. I know you laugh at me. That is what you always have done. Don't imagine that I mind it. I don't one little bit!" And Madame Pichon snapped her fingers. "But you have made me appear ridiculous in the eyes of George; he has chosen you as his ideal. You, forsooth! He confesses it; he glories in it; he proclaims it from the very housetops; and he is about to further advertise it to the whole Parisian world."

"I am right, Sophie. You must indeed be mad."

"I'm drifting towards it, Hélène. For the last four months our engagement has been patent to all my acquaintances. It was an understood thing, and there was nothing to be ashamed of. My cousin, who is my natural guardian, made no objection. The

Barbier made it public property. Ever since I have known George Leigh he has been looking for what in his artist's jargon he calls his ideal, and he found it in me. When he painted the Niobe, he nobly acknowledged the fact to all the world. And then you came between us, Hélène; and the first few months of your wedded life have been devoted to stealing my lover from me, to taking from me the man who would have become my husband. And you have succeeded but too well," and here Madame Pichon burst into a flood of genuine tears.

"Monsieur Leigh and I," said Madame Tholozan with dignity, "have been thrown together by the force of circumstances and my husband's wish ever since my marriage. It was not for me, a young and inexperienced girl, to attempt to break through an arrangement which Felix informed me was a convenient one to all parties. Never has Monsieur Leigh breathed the slightest word of love to me; never has there been anything clandestine between us. The frequent mysterious interviews to which you allude exist only in your own fevered and jealous imagination. Never has Monsieur Leigh shown the slightest penchant for me; never have I had reason to suppose him other than the soul of honour. As to the ridiculous assertion that I am

anything to him, or that I am what you are pleased to term his 'ideal,' it is simply nonsense."

"It is not nonsense, Hélène; it is the dreadful, horrid, wicked truth; and you know it! And your husband and I know it from George himself. He is not ashamed of it—not he; and, as I say, he is about to proclaim it to all the world! If my cousin did not possess the spirit of a George Dandin, he would revenge himself and me by treating my faithless lover as he deserves."

"Calm yourself, Sophie; you speak in riddles. When has Monsieur Leigh proclaimed to any one that I am his ideal? Do you suppose that there is any analogy between my husband and the miserable wretch to whom you have dared to compare him?"

"And you wish me to repeat the details of your contemptible triumph, Madame? You wish to hear me tell you that with my own eyes I saw him put the finishing touch to the hateful face of the principal figure of his picture which now shamelessly simpers at everybody who looks on it. Perhaps Madame Tholozan would pretend that the features of his Phryne are not hers, or that she is dissatisfied with them. No, Hélène, I'll do you both justice, she is your very self; and, I repeat, your husband knows it, I know it, and George glories in it."

"Listen to me, Sophie, I don't understand your mystification. Not half an hour ago I saw the picture, and I stood before it with my husband, hand in hand. Do you think that Felix, even though he had been George Dandin himself, had the nude figure been my portrait, would have borne this thing and have calmly criticised it, and looked on it with approval?"

"And you mean to say, Hélène, that it is not like you?"

"There is not the faintest resemblance. George himself declared only the other day that the face, which is a pretty one, and as like me as I'm like Julius Cæsar, was but a composition."

"Hélène," cried the widow, with a little scream of joy, "is it really so? Do you really mean it? You are not trifling with me?"

"No indeed, Sophie," smiled Madame Tholozan through her tears. "Why should I trifle with you?"

"Oh, what a weight from off my heart. But what a wicked joke for George to perpetrate on me. But you have forgiven me, Hélène? Say you have. And the wretch Felix left me to suppose him faithless. Men are very mean, my dear. Let us go to him, Hélène. I can't rest till I see George, and I

sha'n't be satisfied till I've had it out with that husband of yours."

Madame Pichon rang the bell impatiently, ordered her horses to be put to, and then hurried off to don an elegant morning costume and efface the traces of recent tears.

The two friends were soon *en route* for the doctor's house.

CHAPTER X.

I DIDN'T believe that Sophie could be really angry and genuinely tragic till our very exciting interview at her house. Poor thing, it was cruel of George to have trifled with her feelings. And so he did me the honour to paint my poor face in, after all!

And my husband knew it, and never said a word.

And now he teases me about it, and laughs at us both. He declares that it was very much against the grain indeed, and only at his earnest entreaty that George effaced it; and then he laughs all the more. Oh, if he could only have been just a little bit angry with him over the matter, just the tiniest bit in the world jealous, then I should have some faint hope that he was not indifferent to me. Why, he hasn't even the dreadful affection that Madame Pouilly possesses for her old slippers. But, then, perhaps we haven't been married long enough for that. And why didn't he tell me of it? Simply because it was too trivial a matter to be worth noticing.

All to-day George has worked away at the face with his left arm in a sling, and now the picture is finished at last. But the artist has broken down, as my husband said he would, and the rheumatic fever he predicted has come upon him. All I can extract from Felix is that "he'll be worse before he'll be better." He's ill enough, Heaven knows, now, poor fellow! And of course Madame Pichon has him entirely at her mercy, for she has announced her intention of nursing him herself, and to-morrow she is coming to stay here to carry out her programme. It is quite certain that she will marry him, and perhaps after all that's the best thing that could happen to them both. In five days more the Salon will open, and the picture will be a success—a gigantic success, or an equally gigantic failure.

It was fast approaching midnight on the same evening that the above entry was made in the young wife's diary. George Leigh was tossing uneasily in high fever in the bedroom adjoining the studio. The shaded lamp that lighted the room was so placed as to leave the sleeper in comparative darkness. Dr. Tholozan and his wife were seated on either side of the fireplace, and were talking in a low tone.

"Is it very serious? Tell me, Felix, what you think," said Hélène.

"His youth is in his favour, my child," said the doctor, wearily. "There is not so much danger to his life, as the possibility that he may rise from his sick bed a comparatively broken-down man. I think that is the worst we have to fear."

"But he is in such pain, Felix. Can you do nothing for the pain?"

"I've done all I can, my child," said the doctor. "It's getting late; go and get a good night's rest, my wife. We'll have a professional nurse in in the morning, and then she and Sophie—if Sophie still insists upon it—can take turn and turn about."

"Felix," said Madame Tholozan, after a pause, "let me sit up with you a little longer. I should like to do my share of the nursing. You would wish it, too, would you not, Felix?"

"My dear, you are young and enthusiastic; but in six weeks your enthusiasm will have had time to cool. There are twenty-four hours in every day, my child."

"Let me stay a little, Felix; let me stay a little," pleaded his wife. "Poor fellow, how he tosses and mutters in his sleep!"

"You would be better in bed, my dear," said

her husband, "far better. You may hear things that will distress you. A man in his condition is not responsible for what he says, and the night is his worst time."

And then the sick man began to speak rapidly, but his words were unintelligible at first. He spoke in French, for that had gradually become the language of his everyday life. Little by little his voice became louder, and it assumed an angry and argumentative tone.

"You may say what you pleáse, Duvivier; I've done my best, and a man can do no more," he muttered in querulous accents. "It's not a mere portrait. Of course it's beautiful, and I know I can't do her justice. Who could do her justice? It is but a base and malignant caricature, and yet it's like her in a way. I've tried to catch her smile, that fleeting smile that goes to my very heart's core. Love her! Of course I love her. But she is not for me. Great God, she is not for me!"

And then the sick man ran off into unintelligible mutterings.

"I think I will go, Felix," said the doctor's wife. Her face was pale and there were tears upon it.

"No, child, not yet," said her husband, "have patience a little while. I told you how it was,

Hélène; you wished to stay for his sake; now you must stop for mine. You've heard too much already, or not enough. *Vous avez tiré le vin, mon enfant, il faut payer la bouteille,"* and the doctor grinned one of his most sardonic grins. His wife gave him an appealing look which was unanswered, and then sank back again hopelessly into her chair.

Again the invalid began to speak; this time in softer accents.

"You have a heart of stone, Hélène," he said. "And you have not known that I have loved you, you tell me. You have not known it? Your husband is not so short-sighted. How was I to hide it? How was I to keep the secret which has been consuming me for so long? Madame Pichon has known it. Sophie has seen it all along. Ah, the misery and wickedness of my life in these short months. Can I look on calmly and see you, the woman I love with a furious passion of a first love, and tamely gaze on you as the wife of another? No, it is impossible. It is more than flesh and blood can bear. I know I am a miserable traitor. I know I'm a mean, contemptible hound. Say but the word, and I'll bury myself from your sight for ever. Say but that you are happy and contented, oh, my darling! and I will hasten to that distant land from which

there is no return. You don't say it, Hélène; you don't take away your hand; you don't turn away those lovely eyes. Oh, my love, my love, let us fly. Speak to me."

Then there was a short silence.

"She has gone from me again. Wherever I turn, I see but mocking faces. Do you think I would sell myself, woman?" continued the sick man, roughly. "I'm base enough, God knows, but not base enough for that. Fires!" screamed the raving man, "they burn my very marrow. Oh for a drop of water!"

Dr. Tholozan rose, raised Leigh's head carefully from the pillow, and applied a glass of lemonade to his lips. "Ah!" cried the sufferer with a groan of satisfaction, and then his ravings turned once more into unintelligible mutterings and broken phrases.

"Have you heard enough, Hélène?" said the doctor.

"More than enough, Felix," replied his wife, and she hurried from the room.

Till two hours past midnight the patient continued in a state of fevered delirium, and for that time Dr. Tholozan patiently smoothed his pillow, and moistened his poor parched lips with just the same tender care and affection that a mother might show to a favourite child. Then he took a little

metal case from his pocket, and thrust the tiny glass tube which he took from it between the patient's unresisting lips. He held it there for several seconds, and then he went with it to the lamp, and looked at the reading of the mercury within it with professional gravity. Then he returned the thermometer to its case, and replaced it in his pocket. Then he lowered the lamp and went back to his seat at the fireside.

"I wonder how it will end?" said the doctor to himself; "Hélène's presence here will only fan the flame. What right have I to subject the child to an ordeal such as this? And yet I might have had the sense to know that it must end so. I fear the engineer is hoisted with his own petard; and yet, after all, it's a very interesting psychological experiment. I don't know that in all my long experience I have met with a more instructive case, and if I were a younger man I should be furiously jealous. And yet it's not their fault, poor fools, but mine. And now the murder is out. One thing is certain, Madame Pichon will have her hands full. I begin to wish that I hadn't gone down to Banqueroute-ville after all; it was a sudden and stupid impulse. I have succeeded in raising the devil, when I least expected it. If my young friend had been like the

ordinary run of young men he would have married Sophie and her money-bags long ago; and so he would have but for me. It's all my fault, and Sophie has very little to thank me for. Bah! we must hope for the best. He may marry Sophie out of gratitude yet, after all; and the savings of the late Monsieur Pichon are not such a very nauseous pill. But artists are an impossible race. Yes, I ought to have been jealous, and I should be jealous too if I were not a just man. What affair of mine is it, that this young fellow who has become to me as a son, and wormed himself into my heart—or what I'm pleased to call my heart, for want of a better term—what is it to me that he should sigh in vain for the penniless girl I was dolt enough to make my wife? If his affection were reciprocated, jealousy would be almost forced upon me, or I should at once become ridiculous and contemptible to myself. But it is not so, for the key of the girl's heart is at my disposition; her diary tells me the very working of her soul. Besides, in his raging delirium he merely utters the unrestrained passions of the madman, the better qualities of his mind are almost dormant, while his imagination is fired and his baser passions stirred. Were he himself, his honest soul would have strength to say, *Vade retro*

Sathanas; as it is, his imagination has dwelt upon his picture while searching for a peerless type of beauty: unluckily for me, he seems to have found it in my wife. But, then, that as a rule is the common lot of mortals. They always do find their peerless types in other men's wives, and unfortunately the husbands are often unaware of the value of the priceless treasures they possess, until they are either carried off, or, like riches, take unto themselves wings and fly away of their own accord.

"I think," said the doctor to himself, meditatively, "that vanity is but very slightly developed in Hélène. Upon my life, I don't believe she knows how beautiful she is. Why, any other woman would have been all agog with pleasure to hear that Leigh had even thought of her features as the perfection of earthly loveliness, and it doesn't seem to have affected her one bit. When I told her that the young fellow was madly in love with her she actually wouldn't believe it. She knows it now, however; and, what is more, was deeply moved. That was plain enough by the tears upon her face, and only a little while before she had insisted that it was her duty to take a share in nursing him. You're a strange youth, George Leigh; you have made mad love to my wife in my very presence, and yet you

are as innocent of the fact as a little child. Not an hour ago you were telling her how you loved and idolised her; it was the real George Leigh who spoke then. In a few hours, when you meet, you will have put on your cloak of modesty and prudence; you will have become once more the discreet young Englishman, a very Joseph, still thinking that your secret is your own. And how will she bear it, poor child? Better for her if she paid a short visit to that female philosopher, Madame Pouilly; better for me, perhaps; certainly better for him, very much better for poor Sophie. But then, what would the voice of scandal say? And the *Barbier,* that oracle would certainly speak again. Hélène will have to go through with it; she must face the ordeal; the lady's tender feet must walk over the red hot ploughshares as of old. Yes, in this nineteenth century we have still the trial by fire.

"And if he should die—ah, poor young fellow, if he should die—which of us would feel it most, she or I? I who look upon him as my son, or she who knows from his own lips that he loves her with the burning passion of a first love?"

The cold grey light of early morning was gradually beginning to break through the dim shadows of the sick man's room from under the venetians.

The noise of the traffic in the streets, which had almost ceased since midnight, began little by little to recommence. The doctor looked at his watch, and saw that it was between five and six o'clock. The sick man lay in a heavy dreamless sleep of utter exhaustion. Then Dr. Tholozan arose and turned the lamp out altogether; he placed more wood upon the fire, drew his chair nearer to it, and composed himself to rest. Gradually his lids closed over his fiery eyes; and the only soul in the great house who did not sleep or dream was the young wife, who tossed uneasily upon her pillow. She had lain awake thinking over the exciting events of the last few hours. Overcome by her feelings, she had hurried from the sick man's room. Never till now had Madame Tholozan felt thoroughly and utterly miserable. When she was a friendless orphan at the Villa des Tourterelles, she had been a careless happy girl. Still, a happy girl, she had been introduced to the realities of life under sufficiently favourable auspices. The gilded cage in the doctor's great house had been a pleasant prison, and the bars had been invisible. She had felt a sort of affectionate *camaraderie* for her husband and his cousin, much the same sort of feeling that she had for those fellow schoolgirls who were of her own age, for those

among them who were her friends. When she had ceased to address the doctor as her guardian, and spoken to him as *mon ami,* the words exactly expressed her sentiments; she had honestly come to look on him as her friend, the best friend she had in the world. As to George Leigh, he had interested her; his youth, his good looks, his very profession, and their constant intercourse all contributed to the result. Then, too, he was the first young man with whom she had been brought in contact. The young artist had been a frequent subject, a pleasant hero, on whom her imagination had often dwelt, and this was but natural. The little drama of love and jealousy that had been played before her eyes, as a sort of duologue between him and Madame Pichon, had been a pastoral which at the same time puzzled and amused her. She had wished Sophie Pichon well from the bottom of her heart. Every good woman is a match-maker, and nothing would have pleased Hélène more than to have seen the pair united. She had looked upon the doctor's eccentric theory that the artist admired her as mere badinage, a foolish fancy not in the best of taste; she was annoyed at it a little, perhaps, but it had not troubled her mind, nor gratified her pride, nor caused her pulse to quicken.

But now all was changed. It was almost with horror that she had listened in silence to the burning words of the man who loved her. Had he not told her that her husband knew of his love, and had not Madame Pichon's idle talk confirmed the fact? The sick man had declared that she was his first and only love; he had told her that he was ready to die for her, and he had even urged her to fly with him. That was bad enough; but he had also told her that she was cruel and heartless. Alas, poor child! it was beginning to dawn upon her that what he had called her stony heart was unhappily but too human after all. In the darkness that surrounded her she felt the guilty blush of shame mount upon her innocent cheek as she communed with her conscience, and found that she could not deny its dreadful accusation. But she determined to struggle bravely against herself.

"I should be stony-hearted indeed," she thought, "if I did not sympathise with and pity the poor fellow suddenly stricken down upon a bed of pain, just at the very moment when it was almost certain that he was just about to reap the reward of his successful labours, and attain the pinnacle of a well-earned fame. It is but natural, and I should be indeed a disgrace to my sex if I were to deny him

my sympathy. But we cannot go on as we have been doing. If George's real feelings to me are those he has expressed in the ravings of his illness he must master and overcome them. And he will do so, whatever the effort may cost him; for he is a gentleman, and my husband's friend."

And then she ran over in her memory their many interviews and pleasant conversations before the great canvas, their happy, cheerful talks; and she felt an honest satisfaction that there had been never an idle word between them, that she had breathed no syllable that she would have blushed to utter in her husband's presence, and that no thought of wrong or harm had ever entered her guileless mind. There had been no idea of love, not the remotest semblance of even a flirtation. Playing with fire had never entered into her mind. As she ran back over the pages of her memory, she remembered that the only allusions to the little god had been made when she had honestly pleaded Sophie's cause.

"When George recovers," she thought, "he must leave us; he must take a studio in a more fashionable quarter and then—and then he must marry

Sophie." And suddenly, despite herself, she once more felt the hot blush mantle her innocent cheek. "Ah, but," thought the girl to herself, "if the dreadful words he uttered so short a time ago were the real expression of his feelings, he will never marry her. He said he would never sell himself; his very words seem yet to ring in my ears. And if he should die——" and a cold thrill of horror ran through the young wife's heart, "oh, if he should die. Is he to go down into the grave with the dreadful secret which he thinks untold, without one look of pity, one word of sympathy to gratify his yearning heart? Yes, it must be so, horrible though it is. But Heaven is merciful;" and then she flung herself upon her knees and prayed for the man she loved.

There are some things that are almost too sacred to be described in words. Madame Tholozan remained upon her knees before the little ivory crucifix which had been her wedding present from the dearest of her school friends. Her prayer had been answered, whatever may have been its nature, for there was a happy smile upon her beautiful and innocent face as she arose. And then she lay down once more, and soon she sank into a peaceful

slumber. Probably her thoughts, which now had ceased to be under her own control, were wandering round the future of the hero of her dreams. In her dreams she could roam, all unforbidden, in the happy land of imagination whithersoever her thoughts might guide her willing steps. It must have been a sunny land in some very pleasant place, for there was a smile of pleasure upon the slightly parted lips, arched like the bow of the God of Love, of the dreaming girl. Probably most of us have passed some of the happiest hours of our lives in happy dreamland.

She made a pretty picture, as she lay, her head pillowed upon her rounded arm, her sleeping face framed in the dead gold of the dishevelled masses of her waving luxuriant locks. Just the same scene that was enacted years ago in Ferrara, which Byron has described in rhythmic numbers, was now enacted in the house with the great *porte-cochère* in the unfashionable quarter of modern Paris. The door of the room softly opened, and Dr. Tholozan entered, as though fearful to disturb his wife's slumbers. He gazed upon her long and earnestly, carefully shading her eyes from the light of the candle-lamp which he carried in his hand. He saw the flitting smiles upon her face, placed the light upon the dressing-table,

sank wearily into the big easy chair, and then he shook his head.

"Poor child, poor child!" he said.

Then there was silence.

CHAPTER XI.

A FORTNIGHT passed. "Phryne before the Tribunal" had gone to the Salon. It had been accepted as a matter of course. Sister Brigitte had appeared upon the scene, and Sister Brigitte had worked like a horse. How she managed to make six hours' sleep suffice, taken in two doses of three hours, it is difficult to say. Then, too, Sister Brigitte insisted upon fasting on the regulation days into the bargain. It used to puzzle the invalid how his kindly nurse got into her great starched head-dress of white linen. Then he used to wonder whether she slept in it, and whether she ever took it off. Whenever he woke there was Sister Brigitte, and the great starched head-gear was always as spotlessly white as ever, and the sister, always wide awake, was ever ready to do the sick man's bidding, and attend to his thousand and one little wants. She administered the medicines, she registered the patient's temperature, and as the poor fellow became weaker and unable to move in the bed, having

grown helpless as an infant, she would alter his position, moving him gently and without difficulty, feeding him from a little china vessel which looked like a doll's teapot, and was, in fact, a sort of second mother to the unhappy young man. When he was unable to sleep Sister Brigitte would produce a little black, much-thumbed volume of "The Lives of the Saints." As Sister Brigitte said, it was a very soothing book. Whether there was something soporific about its contents, or whether the fact that Sister Brigitte adopted a peculiar method of reading it to her patients was the cause, it is impossible to say, but "The Lives of the Saints," in Sister Brigitte's hands, were more efficacious than poppy or mandragora or all the drowsy syrups of the world. Sister Brigitte's system was an original one. When she thought it good that the patient should sleep she would suddenly remark: "If monsieur has no objection, there is a little passage I should like to read to him," and out came the little black fat book, and Sister Brigitte would begin at a good round pace. She always opened the book haphazard, and she always began at the top paragraph of the left-hand page. She went steadily on, perfectly regardless of punctuation. Ever and anon she would fling a hasty glance at the patient, and as

soon as she perceived the desired effect was being produced, she used to "slow down" gradually.

The happiest times of the sick man's day were the earlier part of the afternoons and the evenings, for Sister Brigitte would then retire, and Madame Pichon or Dr. Tholozan, or Dr. Tholozan's wife, one or the other, or all of them, invariably sat with him.

All three were in the room whence they had adjourned immediately after dinner.

"Where do you think we've been this afternoon, George?" said Madame Pichon with sparkling eyes.

"I can guess," said the sick man; but there was no answering smile upon his face. "You needn't trouble to break it gently to me," he continued. "I can bear it. It is, as I expected, a failure."

"Let me tell him," said Madame Pichon pleadingly. "It will do him good, and I do so love to be the bearer of good news. George," she went on, and there was triumph in her tone, "we went to the private view at the Salon as you supposed. The 'Phryne' is the picture of the year. It is hung in the very best place, exactly where the 'Dame au Perroquet' was hung last year, and the men, while we were there, were putting up a big semi-circular rail to keep the crush of gazers off it. Every one says that it is the picture of the year, and it was

with difficulty that we could get near it at all. Oh, I'm so glad, George, so glad!" And the happy woman, who always wept on the slightest possible provocation, pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"It's quite true, George," said the doctor, "you've hit the nail on the head this time. And the best proof of it was, that as soon as we got into the building I was pounced upon by your old patron Monsieur Israels. 'I must see my dear young friend at once,' said he, 'if it's only to protect him against the other rascals who will try to swindle him out of it. When can I see him, doctor? To-night? To-morrow? Only tell me when I can see him.' But I explained to him your illness. All to no purpose; he wouldn't go. He clung to me like a leech. 'I did the trick for him, you know, doctor,' he continued. 'I and the *Barbier* between us. Why should he sulk with me?' And it was only by promising him that he should have the first chance, as soon as you were able to see any one on business, that I succeeded in shaking him off. And then he sent you a message. 'Look at that,' he said, and he clutched my arm, 'look at that!' and he pointed out to me a stout Hebrew matron covered with jewellery, who was weeping bitterly by herself in a corner of the gallery. 'Tell him, my good doctor,' he said,

'that lady is my wife; tell him you have seen her! She has never stopped crying, my dear doctor, since she has seen my portrait. Your young friend has been very hard on me, Dr. Tholozan.' So I promised you should see him as soon as you were better, and I got rid of him at last."

A smile of amusement ran over the artist's haggard face. "I've been luckier than I deserve," he said. "Did you speak to any of the critics, doctor?" he continued anxiously.

"Oh yes," said the doctor, "they were full of kind inquiries. I suppose they wanted to add a few lines about the health of the sick lion, for by to-morrow morning you will be a lion, George, and with a very big mane and tail of your own, too, for the matter of that. There was no doubt, my boy, which way the wind blew; everybody talked about the 'Phryne,' and of nothing else. Was it not so, Hélène?" he asked, turning to his wife.

"It seemed so to me, Felix," replied Madame Tholozan. "Yes; everybody was pleased."

"And now let's talk of something else," said the doctor, assuming his professional tone. "We shall only upset our young friend if we excite him any further. Let us make the most of our time, for in

an hour Sister Brigitte will come and turn us out remorselessly."

The bulk of the conversation that ensued was kept up by Madame Pichon. The fair widow described the toilettes, and insisted upon the fact that none of the celebrities of the day were conspicuous by their absence. As for Madame Tholozan, she hardly spoke at all. Truth to tell, she had become very silent lately, but the bright steel needle with which she was netting a long old-fashioned silk purse for her husband's use flashed rapidly through the meshes of the crimson silk.

The sick man's eye rested mechanically upon her pensive face, and watched the busy movements of her pretty hands. Though she did not express it in words, yet somehow or other George Leigh felt assured of the satisfaction she felt in his triumph; he knew instinctively that her heart was too full for words. But the artist was very weak; the excitement of the certainty of his success soon caused his lids to close, and the doctor's warning finger imperiously stopped the commencement of another voluble speech from Sophie Pichon.

The painter's dreams were happy ones, for smiles continually appeared upon his wan countenance.

His three friends sat in silence by his bedside

until the figure of Sister Brigitte, who noiselessly entered the room, warned them that it was getting late; and then they all quietly rose, and with a farewell glance at the sleeping invalid left the sick man's room in silence.

* * * * *

Assuredly had Dr. Tholozan's young wife ever dreamt that any other eye than her own would have perused the pages of the little dainty red morocco volume which she kept locked up in her escritoire, she would have been more careful in the entries which she made. Far better had it been for her if she had contented herself with pouring the story of her life's romance into the discreet ears of some religious director, whose lips, at all events, would have been sealed. But habits grow on us. The mere placing on record of her own feverish emotions and their frequent re-perusal acted but as fuel to the flame of her imagination. Somehow or other, she had made up her mind that George Leigh's illness would terminate fatally. What she would have never acknowledged to a confessor, with the proverbial imprudence of her sex, she did not hesitate to place on record in the fatal pages of the little red-covered book. And day by day, as she detailed the inmost

struggles of her secret soul, she was unknowingly also feeding the flame of her husband's jealousy. For jealousy, which hitherto had been a stranger to the doctor's breast, had now established itself firmly, and the passion, of which he honestly believed himself incapable, had soon altogether mastered his determined spirit. The interesting psychological experiment, which he had deliberately commenced as a sort of pastime, had now ceased to amuse, and had actually begun to frighten him. It may be very good fun little by little to build up a monster of one's own creation, as did the unfortunate Frankenstein in the romance; it may be a wondrous triumph to breathe the breath of life into the monster's limbs; but it is a very awkward thing indeed when one finds that the being of one's own creation is more powerful than oneself, and that one is but as a child in its gigantic grasp.

Dr. Tholozan, then, was eaten up by a furious unreasoning jealousy. When he had calmly suggested to his young wife that he had not the slightest objection to a possible mutual liking between herself and Leigh, and had coolly proposed that the young people in such a case should placidly await his own decease, he had spoken advisedly. For Dr. Tholozan was well aware, in addition to his sixty-one years of

age, that he suffered from a terrible complaint which might at any moment hurry him into the presence of his Maker. It had seemed reasonable enough to him that he could scarcely desire a better fate for the girl he cared for with a father's love than to become the wife of a man whom he liked and respected. In his mind's eye he saw no objection to gradually watching their mutual liking grow into affection, affection that was sooner or later certain to ripen into love. We all remember how Jack sowed the bean one night, and we know how great was his astonishment the next morning when he saw that particularly fast-growing climber already piercing the clouds. Now Dr. Tholozan much resembled Jack. He too had sown his bean carelessly, just as Jack had done; and, like Jack, he was genuinely astonished at its rapid growth, and he was by no means prepared for the abundant crop of troubles which that bean of his was now certain to produce. Dr. Tholozan, we know, was a strong-minded man, but the passion of curiosity was fierce within him. Like the dram-drinker, he could not refrain from his daily dose of poison—his daily peep into the secret recesses of his young wife's heart. What he read in the little book was hardly calculated to reassure him. Had he been a weaker-minded man, or a few years younger,

he would have separated the youthful pair when his suspicions became first aroused. He knew full well that there is nothing more likely to feed the furious flame of an infatuated woman's affection than the fact of misfortune to its object. Prudent paterfamilias knows perfectly well that if his daughter should take an unfortunate fancy to some peculiarly ineligible young fellow, the fact of his failing to pass his examinations, or his becoming a bankrupt, or his forging a cheque, will instantly surround him with a halo of romance. What he read then did not surprise him, but it had the effect of making him excessively angry. Till now the entries in the diary, having reference to young Leigh, had been few and far between. Since the commencement of Leigh's illness the records in the traitorous little volume seemed to speak of nothing else. They had previously been a credit to Madame Pouilly's establishment in the matter of penmanship, now the writing was often hurried and almost illegible, and recently the pages had been blotted with the traces of what must have been tears.

It was evident enough to the doctor that his wife looked upon George Leigh as a doomed man. Probably from this very fact, Hélène, feeling, as she did, that the artist had almost ceased to belong to

this world, gave free vent to her sympathy, her imagination, and—the word must be written—her love for the man she supposed to be dying. The result of this was that Dr. Tholozan was as thoroughly jealous as if he had been forty years younger, and yet he felt that he could scarcely blame either of them. He noted, with a smile, that the hopes as to Madame Pichon's chance of future happiness were no longer expressed. And the doctor, now that the steed was stolen, began to make prudent resolutions about locking the stable door.

Now, had Dr. Tholozan arrived at the same conclusion as his wife with regard to the probable termination of the artist's illness, matters for him would have been considerably simplified. George Leigh being dead, his loss would have been mourned for a longer or a shorter period by the ladies of the doctor's family; and then naturally, in the ordinary course of things, he would have been forgotten. But Dr. Tholozan well knew that the young fellow possessed a splendid constitution. He reasoned, then, that his recovery, bar accidents, was only a question of time; hence it seemed to him that the only escape from the position of ridicule and absurdity, to which he had the very strongest objection, was an engagement between the artist and his cousin. He knew

that the most eager sportsman is not generally the most successful. He gave Sophie Pichon credit for many a determined effort, but he felt sure that as his wife's predilection for his patient became more pronounced, it must ultimately be perceived by the sick man himself, and then Madame Pichon's chance would be gone for ever. "If," thought this old medical fox, "Sophie has failed to captivate George by her money or by her good looks when he was in good health, and she has got no nearer to her object by working on his feelings when he is sick, there is no earthly reason why I shouldn't attempt to bring the fickle youth to book, and so give her a helping hand. Still," thought he, "it will be better to ascertain at once whether she really has made any progress, and then to act accordingly. Anyhow, I will see that she has a fair field." With this intention the doctor packed his wife off to pay a visit of ceremony in the environs of Paris, which would certainly take up the whole of the afternoon; and he retired to his study on her departure, having left word that immediately Madame Pichon arrived, he wished to see her for a few minutes. He had not long to wait. Within the course of half an hour his study door was flung open, and Madame Pichon was announced.

"Sit down, Sophie," said the doctor formally; "I want to talk with you."

"Oh, Felix!" cried the widow as she sank into a chair. "Is it about George?"

"Yes, it is," replied her cousin.

"Felix," cried Madame Pichon, starting up instantly, "don't say he's going to die. He is not worse? Great heaven! he is not worse?"

"Pish," said the doctor impatiently, "don't pose, Sophie. You're always posing. Nobody in this wicked world ever got on by posing, my dear. Do you mind telling me, seriously,—if it is possible for you to be serious,—what your intentions are with regard to young Leigh? In short, Sophie," added the doctor brutally, "do you mean to marry him, or do you not?"

"Felix, I'm ashamed of you," said the widow.

"Fiddlestick," replied her cousin. "At my age, Sophie Pichon, I haven't time to beat about the bush. Come to the point at once, my dear. If you're engaged to marry George Leigh your daily visits here are perfectly natural; if not, you're only compromising yourself unnecessarily."

"Compromising myself," burst in the widow indignantly, "compromising myself! Look nearer home, Felix."

The doctor paled at the thrust. "It's no use fencing with me," he said, "I have always been your friend. Try and be honest and candid for once in your life. Again I say," he continued, and he struck the table fiercely with his fist, "do you want to marry young Leigh, or don't you?"

"Of course I do, Felix," she replied with a sob, "and you know it perfectly well. And so I should have done," she continued indignantly, "long ago,—yes, long ago," she added energetically, "if you hadn't permitted Madame Tholozan to come between us and ruin the happiness of our lives. Do you suppose for one instant, Felix, that I would have sat for hours to that young man if I hadn't meant to marry him? Ah, it was all plain sailing," she said sadly, "till you brought Hélène back with you. My cup of happiness was full till she dashed it from my thirsty lips."

"Don't pose, Sophie, I tell you again," interrupted the doctor. "Your talk sounds like quotations from the dramas of the Porte St. Martin."

"That's exactly how it has been since Hélène came here; just like, as you say, a drama of the Porte St. Martin, only I'm afraid I am no nearer to the happy *dénouement*. That's being candid, I hope, candid enough even for you, Felix."

"Then you have failed altogether, I take it, in bringing him to book? Has it dawned upon you, Sophie, that it is possible for a lady to render herself ridiculous? Does what you are pleased to call your mind fail to perceive that a woman who has once made herself ridiculous by her pursuit of a man ceases to have any chance? If it is not so, it is time you awakened to that fact."

"I can only repeat, Felix, what I said before at the risk of displeasing you. When you talk about becoming ridiculous, Felix, take my advice, and look nearer home."

But the doctor took no notice of her remark.

"You will have one more chance, Sophie; have it out with him to-day. If you two can arrange it between you, well and good. If not, my dear, your visits here must cease at once. You're no longer a child, Sophie, but you must be protected against the results of your own imprudence."

"Cousin Felix," said the widow, with a laugh, "that's very much like what the pot said to the kettle."

"Never mind the pot and the kettle, Sophie; or if you prefer to look upon it in that light, you may take it from me that the pot means what it says."

"Then you seriously suggest, Felix, that I am to go to this young man's sick bed and ask him to marry me? That, I suppose, is the long and short of it."

"You divine my meaning exactly, Sophie; that is the long and short of it. It's the best thing for both of you."

"It would be unfair, Felix, unfair to him."

"Desperate diseases require desperate remedies, my dear," said the doctor, with a bow. "Yours I fear is a very bad case."

"Thanks, Dr. Tholozan," said the widow, with a smile.

"Do you know I mean you well?" he continued more gently. "Have I ever stood in your way, or interfered with you in the slightest degree, through all the weary phases of your long flirtations with my young friend? Not a bit of it. Take heart of grace, Sophie," he said. "You are a very pretty woman. My dear, it's now or never with you. George persists in supposing that he is not long for this world. You will have him all to yourself and observe, my child, he can't run away. I don't think you're deficient in pluck, Sophie. When you entered yourself in the race of which the hand of the late Monsieur Pichon was the prize, you distanced all your competitors;

you won easily, hands down. You were first, the rest nowhere. Think of your former triumph, my dear. As my young friend would say, harden your heart, sit well down in your saddle, and go in and win."

"Ah," said Madame Pichon with a little sigh, as she looked in the mirror and adjusted her chestnut tresses with a careful hand, "I was two years younger then, Felix."

"Preserve your airs and graces for George, my dear. I keep my small stock of compliments for Hélène. As I said before, George is ill and weak, and that is in your favour."

"Felix," said Madame Pichon theatrically, "I will do violence to my own feelings; it is unfair and unwomanly, I know, but I will sacrifice myself. But remember this, Dr. Tholozan, I do it to preserve you and Hélène from the consequences of your own miserable folly and indiscretion."

"Sophie, don't——"

But before Dr. Tholozan could finish the sentence Madame Pichon was on her way to the sick man's room.

Very possibly Sister Brigitte had received a hint from the doctor, very possibly not. But instead of pottering about in an aimless sort of way, as was

her usual custom before she left her patient, she addressed Madame Pichon with a smile, and said, "My patient is better to-day, madame. The description of the boiling to death of St. Maxentius has had a most gratifying effect. Indeed, it produced a natural and healthy sleep. In fact, dear madame, I have noticed that it always has that blessed result. But we are a little low to-day, madame. You will do your best to cheer us, will you not?" Sister Brigitte smiled upon Leigh and his visitor, nodded to both of them, and left the room.

Madame Pichon returned the smile and the nod, and then she dropped into the big armchair at the bedside, and turned to the sick man with a loving look. "I don't wonder you're depressed, George. I once looked into the sister's little book, and it frightened me. But then I'm so easily frightened," she continued, with a sigh. "Oh, George," she added sentimentally, "I shall be so happy when you're able to get to work once more. I wonder whether the old happy days will ever come back to us?"

"I don't believe I shall do any more work, Madame Pichon; something tells me that there is an end to my dreams of ambition."

"George, you're morbid," said his visitor. "You

have attained success. Try to look at things more brightly. I know the world, and, believe me, everything is before you now. You have conquered Fate; you have become a celebrity. Wealth, honours, social standing—everything is within your grasp, George Leigh, and then——" and Madame Pichon's voice faltered, "you will forget us," she added in a softer tone. "It is the way of the world; you will forget us," and she looked at the young man with swimming eyes.

Had her cousin been present he would probably have growled out, "Don't pose, Sophie;" but if she was posing Madame Pichon was posing very naturally, and indeed, the attitude became her, as she very well knew. Is it to be wondered at that the sick man thought so too?

A pretty woman who attitudinises for a gentleman's especial benefit is a pleasant object even to the most *blasé* eye, and it was but natural that the young artist should look at her with a grateful smile. "I shall never forget my kind friends in this house, Madame Pichon," he said, "or the happy hours I've spent here. Alas! they are gone by, and perhaps we shall never have such pleasant days again," he added regretfully.

"Our destinies are in our own hands," said Madame Pichon softly.

There was a long pause.

In that short interval Madame Pichon came to a determination; she burnt her ships, she formed her plan, and she determined to risk her fortune in one supreme effort. "George," she said, "I've come to bid you good-bye." She said it in just the sort of tone she might have used had she been announcing her instant execution.

"To say good-bye?" said the artist with wondering eyes. "It's very sudden. Are you leaving Paris?"

"Yes, Monsieur Leigh," said the lady, "I'm leaving Paris: not by my own wish; far from it. I had once fondly hoped, George, that things would have been different, but Felix is my guardian, and to his wishes I am compelled to bow. And he is right, Monsieur Leigh. Only this morning he said to me, 'Sophie, your visits here must cease.' I was astonished and bewildered. 'Have I offended you, Felix?' I asked him. 'Not in the least, my child,' said he, with the paternal air he habitually assumes when he is going to say something particularly unpleasant. Alas, mon ami!" she went on, "Felix knows everything. He declares that my visits here compromise me; he says that our names have been

coupled together in the public prints, and you will recollect that it was so, George. Why should I not speak plainly to you now? Blind as he has been till now, Felix is at last awake to your terrible infatuation for his wife."

The artist's pale face was suddenly suffused by a deep blush.

"Don't tell me it is not so, George; I have seen it from the first; it has been but too apparent to me ever since my happy life was darkened by her hateful presence. And now my cousin tells me that my visits here must cease. 'If,' said he, 'you were engaged to be married to this man, well and good. Only tell me that it is so, and I've no objection to make.' What could I say, George? My heart was almost breaking. 'Let me bid him farewell,' I pleaded. 'Let me see him for the last time.' I succeeded at last in wringing from him a reluctant consent. George," she said, as she took his wasted hand in both her own, and gazed into his face with hungry eyes, "what am I to tell him? Think me unwomanly if you will. I have trodden my pride under foot to say this thing to you. What am I to tell my cousin?"

In his own heart George Leigh firmly believed that he had not many days to live. We must re-

member that the master passion of his soul was his love for Hélène; his great artistic success, his recent triumph at the Salon, paled into utter insignificance before it; and now he was suddenly told that his old friend's suspicions were aroused, and that the woman he loved would, for his sake, be exposed to the results of the doctor's indignation. "I am probably not long for this world," he thought; "shall I let my paltry pride stand in the way? No, not for an instant. I can save her in a way that will injure no one, pain no one but myself; it is at once my duty and my privilege to do this thing, and I will try to do it gracefully." These thoughts passed very rapidly through the sick man's mind.

Then he sighed, and his thin fingers returned the ardent pressure of Madame Pichon's hand. The trifling action caused the widow's heart to beat furiously.

"Tell him," he said hoarsely, "tell him, dear Madame Pichon, that your visits must not cease. Tell him," he added, with an almost treacherous smile, "that the patient cannot get on without his kind nurse."

"George, you are not jesting?" said the widow; "you are not mocking me? You really, really love me? Oh, George," she went on, "little did I think

when I came into your room to-day to bid you farewell for ever that I should ever know happiness again. I can't realise it, I can't indeed. My dear love," she added softly, "don't talk of dying any more; only promise me that, my best beloved. But I am exciting you. I must try and be calm, too, as you are."

"I fear it's a poor compliment, Sophie," he said.

Never had her own name sounded so charming in her happy ears.

The pair sat in silence for some minutes hand in hand; their hearts were too full for words, but they were actuated by very different feelings. The light of unexpected triumph blazed in Sophie Pichon's eyes, and there was a happy look, too, in the handsome face of the sick man. He forgot his disloyalty to the woman whose hand clasped his in loving trust and confidence, in the supreme delight that he had accomplished the sacrifice of himself at the real shrine of his affections. The door opened softly, and Madame Tholozan entered; she paled at what she saw, she could hardly believe the evidence of her senses. There lay the man who till the moment she entered that room she had been convinced was consumed by a secret passion for herself, the

man whom her own heart had told her that she loved with the burning unreasoning affection of a first love; there he lay, pale as a ghost, his unresisting hand still held in Madame Pichon's.

What could it mean?

But she was not left long in suspense. Madame Pichon rose and embraced her with effusion.

"Dear Hélène," said the widow, "darling Hélène!" she added with a satisfied purr, as she magnanimously kissed the woman she looked upon as her defeated rival upon the lips; "it's all settled, my dear child. I've promised to be George Leigh's wife."

"Sophie," faltered out Madame Tholozan, scarcely restraining a little sob, "I hope—I hope you will both be very happy." But somehow or other she forgot to return the widow's Judas kiss. And then she turned to the sick man, but he lay apparently without life or motion.

"Sophie!" screamed the doctor's wife, as she clutched her husband's cousin by the wrist, "look, Sophie! Oh, my God, he is dead!"

But George Leigh had only fainted.

CHAPTER XII.

HÉLÈNE'S DIARY.

NEVER in my life have I been so terribly frightened as when Monsieur Leigh fainted this morning. I have never seen death, and I actually thought I was face to face with it then, and I fear that I made a fool of myself. The sudden announcement of Sophie's engagement, which was the last thing I had expected, had thoroughly upset me, and when I flung myself on my knees at his bedside, I honestly believed that George had been snatched from us for ever. What could my husband have thought of me, when he entered and found me kneeling in tears clasping the sick man's hand?

And I have been vain enough, and silly enough, to suppose that Monsieur Leigh cared for me, and wicked enough, in a sort of half-hearted way, to reciprocate the affection that I dreamt was mine. And now I see that it was but the creation of my own imagination, the offspring of my wicked and inordinate vanity. My husband tells me that George

will soon be convalescent, and I know, as she not too delicately put it, that Sophie has promised to be George Leigh's wife. I deserve my punishment and humiliation, and, now that he is another's, I may confess it to myself, I have loved him with a wild, unreasoning, selfish passion, the folly and wickedness of which is only now wholly apparent to me. It has been a fevered dream, but it is over now, and I have wished them happiness,—that in itself was a sufficiently severe penance; but many more humiliations are yet in store for me. I shall have to look on and see the woman I despise marry the man I loved; for I did love him. I was weak enough, because I thought him dying, to love him, and to confess to myself that it was so. Alas! I love him still. Perhaps it is better as it is. I alone have been guilty, I alone have sinned. When he is Sophie Pichon's husband I shall be thoroughly cured, I suppose, of my infatuation; till then I fear I must love him still. How much more fortunate is Sophie than I have been. She, too, was a penniless girl. When she sold herself to old Monsieur Pichon she obtained a fortune with a serious drawback, and then Fate steps in and removes the drawback, while the fortune is still her own. Young, rich, and beautiful, free to choose, she looks around her to see to whom she shall toss the

handkerchief. Then she commences her apparently hopeless pursuit of George, and now she is engaged to marry him, and I have wished them happiness. As my husband says, it is the best thing for both of them. If George Leigh had really cared for me, I tremble to think of the possible results. In any case —in any case—lifelong misery for both. Yes, it is better as it is. Dr. Tholozan is right, but it has been a rude awakening for me. I wonder whether my husband would hate and despise me if he knew how things had been with me. No, I don't think it would go as far as that. I should simply become ludicrous in his eyes.

Can George have looked upon me in the light of a plaything, a mere toy, a pastime? No, he is no lady-killer. I alone have been to blame. George would never have dishonoured his old friend's hospitality by even a dishonest thought. I ought to know him by this time. As my husband says, "he is as straight as a die."

And yet, after all, he thought me worthy to represent the type of beauty in his recent masterpiece.

Let me remember that I am Dr. Tholozan's wife, that I have eaten the bread of his charity, that I owe to him everything I have in the world. Let me try

and forget the foolish dreams of a love-sick girl. Let me try to banish George Leigh from my memory if I can; let me try only to think of him as Madame Pichon's affianced husband.

The course of duty is plain; let me try to follow it; let me only try.

George Leigh did not improve as rapidly as had been hoped and indeed expected by his friends. The first person he saw outside the little *coterie* of the doctor's family was his literary ally Duvivier. They talked of the pictures, and Duvivier, who criticised artists as well as dramatists, narrated with great gusto how he had had the pleasure of giving all his friends a helping hand, and how his enemies had been by him carefully flagellated.

"I rubbed it into them," said Duvivier. "It's astonishing how civil all you fellows get to us just at this time of year, how hospitable and generous you all are, and what big cigars and choice drinks you administer to us, when we come to make notes of your canvases. One wretch attempted to bribe me openly. I didn't know him from Adam. 'Have a weed, old man?" he said, as he offered me a Hamburg abomination. 'Fill your pocket, old fellow; there are plenty more where these came from.' On

the *Barbier,* as you know, we always sign our articles; I don't think he will care much for mine. I took his skin off with as much gusto as could have been exhibited by Apollo when he flayed Marsyas."

The two men chatted on—that is to say, Duvivier did, for the invalid mostly answered in monosyllables.

"You seem to me a peg too low," said Duvivier; "you make me almost doubt what I heard this morning."

"What's that?" said Leigh.

"Why, that you were engaged to the chocolate man's handsome widow. They say she's a perfect *Bonanza.* By Jove!" he continued, "there *is* something in it. George, you are blushing like a peony."

"It's true enough, for the matter of that," said Leigh; "but whether I shall ever leave this bed to fulfil the engagement is quite another thing."

"My dear boy," said the other, "the fact of having to fulfil what you call 'this engagement' with one so young, so beautiful, and so wealthy as the future Madame Leigh, would be enough to have made a dead man rise from his grave. Thrice fortunate youth," he continued; "and I was idiot

enough to suppose that you secretly worshipped that dreamy blonde prude, old Tholozan's handsome wife."

Again the artist blushed to his ears.

"What! is that, too, a true bill?" laughed the other. "Don't apologise, George; I acquit you. Madame Pichon's balance at her banker's is far too large for any man to dare to trifle with her affections, and I applaud your choice, George. The widow is genuine flesh and blood, and deliciously plump into the bargain. Yes, you're quite right. I'd prefer honest flesh and blood to all the marble goddesses in Olympus. All the same, old man, I'm not quite sure that the doctor isn't the most to be congratulated after all. He will be doubtless overjoyed to see you happily married, and safely off his premises. You recollect your friend Laguerre? He's not half a bad fellow in reality, you know. Only this morning he asked me if you were the lucky man who was to succeed to the untold gold of the late Monsieur Pichon. When I assented, he declared that you were born under a fortunate star. 'I like your artist friend, Duvivier,' he said, 'though he certainly would have horsewhipped me if you hadn't carried him off. Yes, he'd have done it, regardless of my size. I read it in his eye. I couldn't help liking him, if it

was only for that. It was a wonderful bit of luck for him, Duvivier, when one comes to think of it; we should both have gone across the frontier, and I alone should have returned. It's so difficult to let a fellow off when he has horsewhipped you, you know.' By heavens! he was right, too. Take you all round, my dear boy, you are a favourite of Fortune. Heigh-ho!" said the critic, "I only wish the rich widows would look a little my way. And you, George, persist in being as miserable as if 'Phryne' had been a failure, and your tailor had issued a writ. You haven't perchance been letting the black-coated gentry frighten you, have you, George? You haven't been making your soul? You couldn't look more glum if you had been. Why, only think, my boy, if it hadn't been for your good luck, I might have drawn out the *procès verbal* of your fatal duel with Laguerre, and have earned an honest Napoleon by a laudatory obituary notice of you afterwards."

The painter smiled.

Just then Sister Brigitte entered, and the volatile journalist took his leave with a kindly farewell smile for his sick friend, and a profound bow for Sister Brigitte.

While Duvivier had been visiting young Leigh, Madame Pichon, arrayed in costly raiment of needle-

work, her face beaming with good humour and wreathed in smiles, entered Dr. Tholozan's study, in order to have what she had demanded the day before, a business interview with him; for her cousin was her trustee, and to a certain extent her guardian, —he managed her business matters, invested her money for her, and to the doctor were always referred the thousand and one unfortunate persons whose business it is to practise upon the charity or credulity of wealthy ladies in Madame Pichon's position.

"I am glad you took my advice, Sophie," he said, as he placed a chair for her.

"I always take your advice, Felix," replied the lady, "and I have never had cause to regret doing so."

"And you want to talk about settlements, I suppose? You may make your mind quite easy; George Leigh is a gentleman."

"No, it's not exactly about settlements I want to talk to you, Felix; it's about something far more important, it's about my peace of mind. It is all very well, Felix, but things are upon a different footing now, and I don't want any unpleasant complications to arise. I've never been a jealous woman, Felix. During the whole time of my short married life I never manifested the slightest jealousy of Monsieur

Pichon; but I feel that if he gave me cause I could be horribly jealous of George. I want you to help me, old friend. I know that he is impressionable, and I know that a sick man exposed to dangerous fascinations is apt to be weak. I don't want him to be exposed to temptation, poor fellow. When we are once married it will be a different thing. You can help me, Felix, and you alone. But it is a delicate matter."

"You don't mean to say that you want me to send Sister Brigitte away?"

"No, I can trust Sister Brigitte," said the widow. "You won't be offended, Felix, at what I'm going to say, but to speak plainly, had Monsieur Pichon been alive, and had I been nursing George, it might have interfered with poor Adolphe's peace of mind."

"That's very delicately put, Sophie. I take it that it's my peace of mind you're exercised about?"

"You have hit it. Ever since this terrible episode, when George showed his fatal infatuation, I have been anxious for you, Felix."

"Thanks, Sophie; but I am quite capable of taking care of my own interests."

"You'll acknowledge that they have been imperilled at least, I suppose?"

"If I hadn't known you from a child, Sophie, I

should have to be angry with you; but nothing that you can say, or think, my dear, will irritate me."

"And yet I've thought a good deal, and unless I'm very much mistaken you too have, as you put it, been considerably—exercised, Cousin Felix. Till our engagement took place George may be said to have been common property; now he is my very own, and the position is changed. He must be removed from dangerous associations, Felix."

"My dear, he can't leave his bed for three weeks."

"Then if he can't be removed from the danger, let us remove the danger."

"You were always a woman of invention, Sophie; can you suggest a way?"

"The suggestion must naturally come from you."

"I'm afraid I can't help you, my dear."

"And you mean to tell me, really and seriously, that you're not just a little bit jealous, Cousin Felix? You, who with your own eyes saw the absurdly flattered likeness of Hélène, which George had the wickedness to insult us both with? You were very angry indeed at the time. Of that I am sure."

"I was annoyed, my dear, for the moment; but I had reason to see my own folly. I read Hélène's

soul as I read an open book, Sophie,—as I read an open book," said the doctor, bitterly. "Besides," he went on, "why should I be jealous of the man who is about to marry my own cousin? It will be a different thing, perhaps, when he has carried out his intentions. Till then, however, I think I may rest easy."

"It's so like you to say that, Felix, it's just one of those spiteful, bitter speeches which are habitual with you. But nothing can ruffle me. I decline to bandy left-handed compliments with you. Would you mind obliging me for once, cousin, by just simulating a jealousy which is of course foreign to one who is such a philosopher?" She placed her hand on the doctor's affectionately. "Try for once in your life, Felix dear, to think that Hélène is but human after all, and very much like the rest of her sex."

"My dear Sophie," said the doctor, "Hélène wouldn't believe me; she knows well enough that she has given me no cause for jealousy. Besides, my dear, I am an old man, and if I behaved like an idiot she might think my mind was giving way."

"She should have thought of that, Felix, when you married her," said Madame Pichon, spitefully.

"I'll do anything I can to oblige you, anything in reason; but I confess I don't feel myself equal to the *rôle* of Othello, even in jest, and for your sake, Sophie."

"Take care you don't have to play it in earnest, Felix."

The doctor moved uneasily in his chair.

"I almost begin to think, my dear," he said, "that you'll have rather a rough time of it, if, when you've married your artist, you should feel yourself compelled to run about among your male friends suggesting that they should be jealous of their wives for his sake. The idea is sufficiently comic."

"Felix, a little jealousy is a delightful thing in a man; in a married man, I mean. We know then that he loves us. The late Monsieur Pichon was frightfully jealous. Not that I ever gave him the slightest cause, you know; but his jealousy gave me unspeakable pleasure. Felix," continued the widow solemnly, "there must be no more *tête-à-têtes;* they were bad enough before, but as we are situated now they would be highly indecorous."

"Very well, my dear; it shall be as you wish. Hélène or I will contrive to be present whenever you visit your invalid."

"You persist in misunderstanding me, Felix.

Were I a young girl, my seeing the man I am engaged to marry, alone, would be of course impossible; but being a widow things are very different. We have naturally a great deal to say to each other, a great deal to arrange, much to talk over. Situated as we are, *tête-à-tête* interviews are indispensable."

"For the riveting of the fetters, I suppose?"

"Don't be unkind," said the widow, with a little sigh. "What you are pleased to call the riveting will be a very pleasant process for both of us, I think; and I'll try to render it as painless as possible to poor George. But, Felix," said the widow solemnly, "Hélène is young, romantic, and impressionable. Shield her from temptation; the very fact of his being engaged to another renders him more attractive in any woman's eyes. Don't you think that Sister Brigitte needs assistance? Don't you think that if we had another sister it would be nicer for him? The air of the sick-room seems to my mind to be telling upon Hélène; she looks pale, anxious, and ill."

"There you're right, Sophie," said the doctor, "the poor child got it into her head that my young friend would not survive this illness, and she became naturally depressed. He thought so too, poor felow; and I believe thinks so still. But I doubt

whether Sister Brigitte would consent to accept a coadjutor. Still, he'll have something else to think about now, and he can hardly suppose himself a dying man when he proposed to you yesterday, or *vice versâ,* as the case may have been."

"Dr. Tholozan, you forget yourself. Oh, Felix, I'm bewildered by the greatness of my happiness. Will it be very foolish if I come to see him every day? Will he tire of me?"

"The feeling of weariness, my dear, does not as a general rule come on until after marriage."

"Oh, Felix, if he should back out of it after all. No, I shall make a point of coming every day. I shall see more of Hélène. I shall insist on her driving with me every afternoon, and I shall dine with you, every day, if you don't mind, until he is out of danger."

"Certainly, my dear, certainly; we shall be delighted."

"And if Sister Brigitte won't have assistance, and she's an obstinate little old woman, I shall be ready at any time to relieve her, or even to take her place. What could be more natural? what could be more appropriate?"

"Have your own way, Sophie," said the doctor, "sail your ship yourself. By-the-bye, where are you

going to-day? You seem more than usually gorgeous, and dressed as for some important function."

"I'm going to see the man I love. I'm going to take him these flowers and this fruit," she said, pointing to a bouquet of orchids and a basket of phenomenal grapes. It is the privilege of defenceless widows, Dr. Tholozan, to attend to the sick and minister to their wants. It is, as you say, an important function. Do you like my dress?" and she gave a sort of pirouette, and dropped him a low courtsey. "And now, as I want to see my patient, kindly let Sister Brigitte be informed of my presence. I've ordered the carriage at ten, and I'm going to make a long day of it."

And then Madame Pichon was escorted to the sick man's chamber by the doctor's parlour-maid, and the process of riveting the fetters commenced in earnest.

"Don't mind me, George," she said as she entered the room, a strong whiff of tuberose, her favourite perfume, being diffused around her, "I'm going to be here a great deal now." It's just as well to let the Sister see how matters stand between us, she thought, and she walked up to the bed, took off her elaborate bonnet, and kissed the artist on his forehead.

Sister Brigitte's eyes opened very wide indeed.

"You won't excite my patient, Madame, if you please," said Sister Brigitte.

"Oh no, dear Sister; he's quite safe in my hands," said the widow. Why doesn't the cross old thing go? she thought to herself; if I suggest it she will stick here like a limpet. I thought the kiss would have frightened her away. "What can I do to be useful, Sister?" she said aloud in her blandest tone. "I'm only an amateur, you know, your last new pupil, and oh, so anxious to learn!"

But the look of affectionate interest that she cast on her was wasted on the Sister.

"We've been awake since breakfast," she said, "and I think we're getting a little fatigued and weary. I usually read to him at this time; he soon drops off. Since Madame has been so considerate as to offer to lighten my labours, she might perhaps like to read. My eyes are not what they were," said Sister Brigitte, "and Madame's voice is softer."

"I shall be delighted," replied Madame Pichon, effusively. "What shall I read, George?" she said.

"I marked where we left off," said the Sister, as she placed "The Lives of the Saints" in her victim's hand. "It is very good indeed of Madame," and

then she composed herself comfortably in her chair, drew a big ball of grey worsted and a pair of knitting needles from her pocket, together with an unfinished grey stocking, and clapping a pair of tortoiseshell spectacles upon her nose, she commenced to knit mechanically, and looked expectantly at Madame Pichon.

There was no escape.

Now nothing had been further from the widow's mind than reading aloud to the invalid. Reading aloud is an accomplishment which, like music, is not acquired without a considerable amount of practice. Those who are in the habit of reading aloud are generally very unselfish people. As a rule, if they read well they sacrifice themselves to their audience, and Madame Pichon was distrustful of her own powers, and terribly afraid of making herself ridiculous. Had it been a romantic novel, or had they been alone, she would not have hesitated to do her best to amuse her affianced husband; but to be ordered to read a gentleman to sleep is an ordeal, particularly when one feels that one has a great deal to say to the gentleman which is not at all of a soporific nature.

George Leigh was very weak and very feeble, but he had sufficient strength to smile at Madame

Pichon, and she returned his smile, for the oddness of the situation tickled them both.

"Don't you think, Sister Brigitte," said the widow, "that the subject is a trifle depressing?"

"Ah, Madame," said Sister Brigitte, "he won't listen to the words at all; it will be simply the continuous sound of your voice that will make him drop off. It wouldn't be half so valuable a book for nursing purposes if it were interesting. As it is it's infallible. Madame may have noticed that when she goes to buy a song-bird, the birdseller invariably shakes up some seed in a sieve, and then all the birds sing at once; they can't help it, poor things. Now my little book, like the bird-fancier's sieve, never fails; only it has directly the contrary effect. Courage, Madame; it is the kindest thing you could do for him."

Thus adjured, there was nothing left for Madame Pichon but obedience. She gave a little pout, found her place in the book, and then she plunged into "The Lives of the Saints."

And Sister Brigitte was right; within ten minutes, what with his weakness and the effects of the Sister's panacea, George Leigh was sound asleep.

Madame Pichon, who had taken a little tender

gaze at the sufferer between each paragraph, saw that it was so and ceased to read.

"He has dropped off, I think, Sister," she said, softly.

Sister Brigitte did not answer; she merely raised a warning finger, and then went on with her stocking-knitting.

Madame Pichon closed the book, and then she took a good long look at the sleeping man. Never before had the widow had an opportunity of gazing uninterruptedly at him with a critical eye. He was sleeping peacefully, with slightly parted lips. Dear fellow! she thought, he is beautiful even in sleep; and the remembrance that her deceased Adolphe always slept with his mouth wide open and snored fearfully made Madame Pichon give a little shudder. How terribly pale he looks, she thought; his hands seem more like carved ivory than flesh and blood. Oh, if he were to die, and I were to lose him, after all! I wonder whether the Sister will go on knitting and not leave us at all. Stupid old woman, she looks as if she could knit on for ever. As for George, he may sleep for hours.

And then she crossed the room on tiptoe and whispered to Sister Brigitte pleadingly: "Let me

know when he wakes, dear Sister Brigitte; he is my affianced husband, you know," she added, confidentially, "and we have a great deal to say to each other."

The Sister nodded and smiled, and Madame Pichon left the room as noiselessly as the heavy *frou-frou* of her handsome silk dress would permit; but as she closed the door she kissed her finger-tips to the sleeping man.

Then Madame Pichon partook of an excellent *déjeuner* with her cousin and his wife. Then she suggested that Madame Tholozan should go for a drive with her; but she could not prevail upon her cousin's wife to accompany her, and so she started alone.

Still the sick man slept on, and just as Madame Pichon had left him, so Dr. Tholozan found him in a heavy dreamless slumber when he entered the room. Sister Brigitte was still knitting steadily on; she had completed at least two inches of her stocking from the time when George had first commenced to doze.

"It's a sound, natural sleep," said the doctor, "and will do him all the good in the world. Go and get a nap yourself, Sister," he added, good-

naturedly. "I will stay with him for awhile, and my cousin on her return will be only too delighted to take my place."

The Sister nodded, and did as she was bid.

The doctor dragged the great winged, padded chair, in which the Sister was accustomed to keep her nocturnal vigils, right in front of the smouldering fire. It was a particularly comfortable chair; the great padded back and sides gave rest to the weary head, and protected the sitter from every possible draught. "Just the very chair for an old man like myself," thought the doctor. "Perhaps in a year or two this very old chair may be my home; I may not be able to quit it, I may even die in it. There are worse fates for a man, for she will tend me and smooth my path to the grave. And then they can be happy. But will they wait so long? It's a mystery to me," he thought, as he sat basking before the fire, entirely concealed by the great chair, "how they have managed to hide it from each other, and how they have both involuntarily taken me into their confidence—he through his picture, she through her diary. If I were ten years younger, or if I loved Hélène with anything else but a father's love, I should have boiled over long ago. As it is, the young fellow seeks to conceal his love for my wife

by engaging to marry my cousin, feeling perfectly certain in his own mind that he has not many days to live. It's a pretty complication; I wouldn't have believed it possible twenty-four hours ago."

As these thoughts ran through the doctor's mind, he heard the door gently opened.

Madame Tholozan entered softly. She gazed upon the sleeping man, whose face was turned towards the door.

"Sister Brigitte," she whispered, "Sister Brigitte!"

There was no answer. The silence in the room was unbroken save by the soft breathings of the sleeping man. "How cruel of her," thought the young wife, "she has left him all alone." And then she stood by the bedside and looked at him sadly, her heart overflowing with pity and affection. "I may not love him," she thought, "but I may pray for him," and she dropped gently on her knees by the bedside, and buried her face in her hands absorbed in silent prayer.

It would be idle to attempt to put into words the agony of that long prayer.

Whilst she knelt, her husband's face appeared from behind the wing of the great chair; his eager eyes took in the situation at a glance, and then his head disappeared once more.

"Oh, George, George!" she moaned aloud, and tears dropped plentifully from the lovely eyes, "do not go from me. Oh, if you could only be spared to me! Oh, my love! Oh, if I could only die for you. Oh, if my wicked wasted life could only be accepted for yours—you who have so much to live for, while I have nothing left to me, not even my hopeless love!" And then again the unhappy girl buried her face in her hands and burst into an agony of silent tears.

George Leigh had heard her words as in a dream, his eyes opened and he ran his hand nervously through the dank mass of his hair, and then he stared at the little golden head, whose face was hidden, in bewildered astonishment.

Once more she raised her head, and their eyes met. She did not move from her kneeling position.

"You have come to bid me farewell, Hélène," he said softly, and he lingered lovingly upon the name he had dared to utter aloud for the first time. "You can forgive me, Madame Tholozan? You can forgive the wrong I did my friend's wife in a moment of folly? Say you forgive me, Hélène, and I shall die happy."

She never answered him at first, but she placed

her hand on his, then she gave a deep sigh, and then she spoke in a broken voice, her eyes still streaming with bitter tears:

"My folly and wickedness have been greater than yours, George, for I have loved you with a passionate and wicked love that I have hardly dared to confess even to myself. You will think me a shameless woman, George, when I confess it to you face to face, as I do here upon my knees. My husband tells me that it was only natural that I should love you. We have both sinned, George. Heaven grant that we may be forgiven hereafter. We shall never meet again in this world. Oh, my love, my first, my only love, let me tear myself from you while I have strength!"

Is it to be wondered at that the sudden knowledge that his secret love was returned should cause his face to light up with a smile of triumph, should cause the eyes of the sick man to sparkle with unwonted brilliancy?

"Stay with me yet a moment, darling," he said, as he clasped her warm hand in his emaciated fingers. "You do love me, Hélène?" he said.

"I do indeed, George," she replied.

"I would have died to have heard those words.

Kiss me once, my darling. My old friend wouldn't grudge us this one kiss, or even Heaven itself."

She never thought of resisting his will; it dominated her. Could she refuse to press her lips to the lips of the man who loved her, and into whose greedy ears she had but that moment poured the tale of her own passion?

She was but a woman after all, an erring, trusting woman. Better for her if she had refused, better for them both. Their lips met in one fervent melting kiss.

"Farewell, George," she cried, "farewell for ever," and she rushed from the room.

The old man who sat in the big chair before the smouldering fire never moved. He had heard enough, more than enough; his heart was turned to stone. He sat and thought before the fire and gazed into the embers, and when an hour after Sister Brigitte entered the room she still found him sitting there in silence.

The sick man was asleep, a happy smile upon his wasted features. The doctor stretched himself.

"I think I must have been dreaming, Sister," he said; "anyhow, your patient is sound asleep, and there's no medicine like good natural sleep, after all. Ah! I've let the fire out, Sister Brigitte," he

went on, "excuse my forgetfulness," and he left the room and tottered as he went.

"What a wreck he looks!" thought the Sister. "I wonder he doesn't frighten his patients; he must be eighty if he is a day."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE mutual declaration, or rather confession, which the artist and the doctor's wife had made to one another in the presence of the person who, next to themselves, was most interested in the matter, had been almost involuntary. Probably when Madame Tholozan, in the agony of her soul, kneeling in prayer by what she supposed to be the dying bed of the man she loved, had gradually slid in her mental struggle from mere meditation into audible words, she had done so unwittingly. George Leigh's passionate declaration to her was but the solemn utterance of a final farewell. As has been said, the effect upon the involuntary eavesdropper had been to turn his heart to stone. He had looked upon their mutual liking with a forgiving eye; we know the feeling that he had entertained for his beautiful young wife was an affection entirely devoid of passion. He took a natural pride in her beauty; he was gratified by her solicitude for his comfort and amusement, he trusted her implicitly; but no one

knew better than Dr. Tholozan himself that the impassable gulf of forty years stood between them. Probably, had the daily entries in his wife's diary never met his eye, he would have been contented to rub along contemplating the growth of her affection for the artist calmly enough from a philosophical standpoint; but what he had heard, coupled with the accurate knowledge he possessed of the state of his wife's heart, upset all his calculations, and, strange to say, rendered him furiously jealous. He knew enough of George Leigh to be perfectly aware that the young man was bound hand and foot to that child of earth, his own handsome cousin. He knew well enough that Madame Pichon would never release her victim from his engagement. The doctor then was considerably astonished to find himself eaten up by a furious and unreasoning jealousy of the two innocent young people, who in his very presence had declared their mutual love. At first he pictured himself looking on, as a sort of disinterested and amused spectator, at the inevitable complications that must ensue; and it was with considerable surprise that he found that he had ceased to be disinterested, and that the contemplation of his position only angered and annoyed him. Whatever might be the result, he felt that his own position, day by

day, must become more ludicrous; and this was made doubly galling when he remembered that he had only himself to thank for it. True, there were the numerous possibilities of the chapter of accidents. It was remotely possible that the sick man might succumb. It was open to him, too, to make an appeal *ad misericordiam* to his wife's sense of justice; but Dr. Tholozan felt that he could not descend to this. He felt far more inclined to take the sick man into his confidence, and argue with him as man to man; but, though that course might be open to him ultimately, he felt that in the artist's present state it was impossible. The more he turned the matter over in his mind, the more he felt that he had no one to blame but himself; and he knew that if he trusted to Madame Pichon's fascinations to cure young Leigh of his infatuation, he would be leaning on a broken reed. But what astonished him more than anything was the sudden awakening of his own unreasoning jealousy. There was a time when he had almost found a pleasure in the idea of his young wife's finding rest and happiness in a marriage with the artist after his own death. The first contingency was now repugnant to him, and somehow or another he dismissed the second from his calculations. His feelings had considerably

changed towards the young people. Previously, in theory, he had manifested an extraordinary toleration for the growth of the natural affection between them which he looked upon as inevitable. Now he suddenly remembered that he was Madame Pichon's cousin, he bethought himself of his duties to her, and he felt himself a sort of righteous judge, prepared to mete out punishment untempered by mercy to the two criminals should occasion serve. He now longed for night, that he might read the latest entry in his wife's journal, and thus become aware of the inmost workings of her mind. It didn't trouble him a bit that he had been taking an unfair advantage of her. Dr. Tholozan did not stick at trifles; in fact, as we shall see hereafter, he stuck at nothing.

The doctor and the two ladies sat down to dinner. While the servants were present the conversation was general; as soon as they left the room, the doctor and his wife lapsed into silence, and Madame Pichon took up the running.

"Do you know, Hélène," she said, "that I've been horribly jealous of you and Sister Brigitte lately? I've quite made up my mind, my dear, that we shall make a sort of grand tour immediately after our marriage, and so prolong the honeymoon indefinitely, and give George the rest and change of

scene he needs so much. Besides, it's just as well that he should shake himself free of old associations and old entanglements," she said, spitefully. "He'll be called upon to fill a very different position now, you see. He has had to paint for bread, poor boy, till now; if he persists in going on with it after our marriage it must be only as an amusement. He'll have his hands pretty full when we come back, for I shall entertain a good deal. Since poor Pichon died, etiquette has forbidden my seeing my friends; in fact, you and Felix have been almost my only guests. Why shouldn't George become naturalised and attempt political life?" she added with a sigh.

"My dear Sophie," said the doctor, "George has already attained success in his own line; his social success will be pretty apparent when he marries you. He was always a favourite with the women,"—here Madame Tholozan blushed to the ears,—"as is natural enough, for my young friend is undeniably handsome."

"You don't exasperate me, Felix," said the widow, "in the least."

"I don't want to alarm you," replied the doctor; "but what I say I mean. I have the strongest evidence of the young Englishman's having inspired

at least one tremendous passion." Again Madame Tholozan blushed to her ears.

"I don't believe it. George is discretion itself; and if he were wicked enough to have ever inspired a passion, as you call it, he'll have sense enough to see that the day for that sort of thing for him is past. If he ever had disgraced himself by such a thing, Felix, I am quite sure you are the last person he would have chosen for a confidant. He would have been much more likely to have told me."

"My dear Sophie, rest assured that you will be always the very last person to hear of his little successes. Besides, I didn't say he told me. I may have heard it from the lady in my professional capacity; we hear many strange things at the bedside."

"I never thought much of your profession, and I think still less of it now, when I hear from your own lips that your patients, instead of talking about their ailments, choose you as the person into whose ears they pour their rapture for my affianced husband. Like you, Felix, jealousy has never troubled me. Poor Monsieur Pichon never gave me cause. Besides, I have far too high an idea of my own attractions. Am I not the original of the Niobe? Did not my features, softened by recent grief, inspire

George with the idea of his Sigismonda? Had George been actuated by mercenary motives, he would have spoken long ago; but he is so diffident, so bashful, poor fellow. It seems so long ago, and yet it was only yesterday that he nerved himself to declare his love. Oh, Hélène, I feel at peace with all the world! I could forgive even a rival now. Kiss me, darling," she said, and she turned her cheek to her cousin's wife.

Hélène kissed her, doing as she was bid.

"I don't know, though," the widow went on, "how I should have felt towards a successful rival. Paris has given me the apple, you see, and I'm naturally grateful. But I've been here since ten o'clock, and I haven't had more than ten minutes of George's society, and then Sister Brigitte made me read that hateful book, 'The Lives of the Saints,' to him. Let us go to him, Felix. The carriage is ordered in an hour, and the poor fellow must be literally hungering for my society."

"It seems to me, Sophie, that the hungering is mutual. As you say, let us go to him at once. It is but natural, after all, that the poor fellow should be craving for the presence of the woman he loves. It is but natural, is it not, my child?" he said, turning towards his wife.

"I suppose so," said she, wearily, and again the tell-tale blush spread itself on her expressive face. "But I am out of sorts, Felix; I think I shall ask you and Sophie to excuse me. I think I'll lie down a little, for I have a headache, and the close air of the sick-room may upset me."

"I sha'n't excuse you for an instant," said her husband's cousin, as she took her victim's hand and gazed into her eyes. "I want you to see our happiness, and be the witness of my triumph. Besides, my dear," she continued, with a little laugh, "think of the *convenances.* Felix would certainly go to sleep in the easy-chair, and then we should be practically alone. That couldn't be permitted under present circumstances, even for an instant. You'll have to come, dear, if it's only to play propriety."

"There's hope for you yet, Sophie. You have actually begun to awaken to the fitness of things. Come with us, my child, and play propriety. The duties of the daisy-picker are dull; but resignation, my child, though at times difficult, is always a Christian virtue."

And the procession of three, headed by Madame Pichon, walked towards the sick man's room.

"I am sincerely glad to see you, ladies," said Sister Brigitte. "In the first place, I'm terribly tired,

and I shall be so glad to take my dose of sleep. Secondly," she added, turning to the doctor, "the poor young gentleman wants rousing; he takes a most sombre view of his situation; and though I tell him that his convalescence is rapidly approaching, he merely shakes his head and smiles meaningly. Oh, doctor," she went on, "if you would only make him understand that he's bound to get well, whether he will or no! He is gaining strength daily, I'm sure, for he won't listen to 'The lives of the Saints' any longer, and that's always a certain sign. Try to cheer him, dear ladies. You, madame," she added pointedly to the widow, "should exert your influence."

And then Sister Brigitte, who looked rather like a dissipated owl, politely stifled a yawn and retired to rest.

Madame Pichon sat down in the easy-chair at the bedside, as a matter of course. Was it not hers by right of conquest? Hélène, with one single stolen glance at the sick man—a glance not unobserved by her husband—produced her dainty netting with its little ball of crimson silk, its ivory mesh, its steel needle, and its fairy stirrup, and she commenced working in silence, her eyes fixed upon the little purse. The doctor disappeared into the great winged

chair before the fire, and gave himself up to unpleasant reminiscences of what he had heard when last he sat there.

And then the patient opened his eyes.

Madame Pichon placed her jewelled fingers with an air of gentle proprietorship upon the sick man's brow, and, as she did so, the rattling of her bracelets sounded to him like the clank of chains.

"Your forehead is cool, George," she said, "and you have slept. Your pains are less, I trust, *mon ami?* You are better, say, is it not so?" then she took his hand.

"Every one tells me so, dear madame," he replied; "but I'm very weak, though I no longer suffer so much actual pain."

"George," said the lady, "we haven't quarrelled yet; we shall never quarrel, I hope, dear love; but for you at least Madame Pichon has ceased to exist. I am Sophie now," she added softly, "and you are George. Let us be George and Sophie to the end of the chapter, and when you call me Madame Pichon I shall know you're angry with me."

Her words were lost upon the sick man, his eyes were fixed with a burning gaze upon the downcast head of the woman he loved, but their glances never

crossed, for Hélène stared persistently at her netting. She dared not meet his eye.

"I've told them everything," continued Madame Pichon, "there never need be secrets between us four, need there, George dear?" added the widow.

The invalid did not dispute this proposition.

"Felix," said Madame Pichon, "don't isolate yourself. In that hideous chair we cease to be aware of your presence."

"That's exactly the beauty of it, Sophie," answered the doctor; "the chair renders me invisible, and I am no longer the skeleton at the feast. Besides, it's a comfortable chair, suitable for an old man like me. I can look on as a disinterested spectator now, though a few days ago I was very anxious about you, George Leigh. Now you have nothing else to do but to make up for lost time, to eat, drink, and sleep your very utmost, and bask in Sophie Pichon's sunny smiles. You're a lucky fellow, George, a lucky fellow with nothing to regret, everything to hope for, and nothing to reproach yourself with. Is it not so, my young friend?" said the doctor, giving his verbal knife a dexterous twist, as he placed a fresh log upon the fire.

"I've a great deal to be grateful for," replied the young man enigmatically.

"I should think so, indeed. Half Paris is singing your praises already at the Salon, and all the men will be envying you your good fortune. You did right, my boy, to strike while you were an interesting invalid. You wouldn't have had half the chance had you been in robust health. Pity is always akin to love, you know. Why, there's Hélène there, she wouldn't have married me if it hadn't been for pity; it's the same sentiment that makes her net that pretty purse for me. Why, when you were really in danger, George, there wasn't a dry eye in the house, even Sister Brigitte took more than a professional interest in you. It's a great thing to be young and good-looking, my friend. By the way, there's a matter of business I wanted to mention to you. Israels has been here twice a day ever since the opening of the Salon. You'll have to see him, you know, or else give me power to treat."

And so the desultory conversation went on between the three, Madame Tholozan alone taking no part in it. Ten o'clock came at last, and Madame Pichon's carriage being announced, the enamoured widow reluctantly tore herself away. Madame Tholozan, too, retired at her husband's suggestion, and the doctor then seated himself by the sick man's

side. After a little pause the doctor cleared his throat and began to chat.

"You and Sophie certainly astonished us, my young friend," he said. "I had no idea things had gone so far between you, until she announced to me your actual engagement. You've both been a little shy about it, you know. To tell you the truth, George, I was pleasantly surprised, for I had suspected you" —the invalid started—"I had suspected you of a penchant for some one else. Shall I be candid? Old friends, like you and I, should be candid with one another. I thought there was a little tenderness on your part for Hélène, and more than that, at times I fancied that it was returned." He laid his hand on the sick man's wrist, and mechanically placed his thin fingers on the pulse. "I shouldn't have been surprised," he went on carelessly, "even if this had been the case. The fact is, you've been thrown so much together, you two, by my fault," he added, "by my fault. But now I see that, with regard to you at least, I was certainly mistaken. How intensely ridiculous we jealous old fools must appear to other people. But if it had been so with Hélène, if she had allowed her passion to outrun her prudence, and permitted herself to become infatuated with your good looks, my boy, as things have turned out, her sufferings

would have been severe, she would have felt the tortures of the damned. How fast the pulse is, George; you are very shaky yet."

Why did not George Leigh take the doctor into his confidence? Probably from a mistaken sense of honour. We know that Dr. Tholozan was in possession of the secret of his young wife's heart; we know that he had sat and heard the mutual declaration of these two poor lovesick fools; and we know that he looked upon the artist's engagement to his cousin in its true light—merely as a deliberate sacrifice of himself on the young man's part, a sacrifice made in cold blood for the sake of the woman he loved.

"You have often told me, doctor," said the sick man, wearily, "that a marriage of reason is the safest of all unions. Madame Pichon has been excessively kind to me; she has always taken an interest in my work,—that in itself is a great deal. And as you have repeatedly said, one must settle down sooner or later. When a woman takes an interest in a man, doctor, she interests him at once; she does not become less interesting if she happens to be young, rich, and handsome."

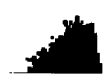
"You are progressing rapidly, George Leigh. Not so long ago you were but a dreamer of dreams; and now I find you a nineteenth-century philosopher.

You are coming round to my views of life; you are right, too, from every point of view, for, even had my ridiculous theory been correct, there might have been a weary while to wait before you could realise your mutual dreams."

The artist made no reply.

"It's amusing," thought the doctor to himself, "how this young Jesuit follows his natural instinct, and still seeks to deceive me. Poor wretch! like the fabled ostrich, he buries his head in the sand, and fancies himself securely hidden. There is one comfort, he'll find his punishment in Sophie, if he does marry her. If Sophie had her way, she'd carry him about on her head in a glass box as the Genius carried the Lady."

Young Leigh had dropped off again into a fitful slumber; the doctor sat and gazed at him in silence, and meditated long and deeply. "Why couldn't he be content," thought the old man to himself, "with his professional success, with the pretty doll who has flung herself into his arms, with her money and her beauty? for she is undeniably handsome, and beautiful in her way; a pleasing object for a weary eye to rest upon. Or, failing that, why couldn't he wait for the woman he really loves? Why have the years rolled back with me, why is the common lot of all



husbands come upon me, why am I as savagely jealous as an enamoured boy? Why have the resources of my art placed the old man's vengeance easy to his hand? And if I take that vengeance, I shall be tortured by remorse, for I loved him—I did love him as a son. He has had his chance, and cast it aside. Why couldn't he have taken me into his confidence? If I do this devilish thing, I too shall suffer: as would she, the woman who has cheated me and deceived me in her heart, the woman who will loathe me soon, if she does not loathe me now. I might murder him with impunity; no one would be the wiser, no one would see the hand that struck him down. But that would be but a poor sort of vengeance. I should but separate them for a while, to meet again hereafter—if there be a hereafter. No, the other course is the one I must follow. I must steel my heart to thoughts of pity, and stand by and see the consummation of my own revenge. Sleep on, poor wretch," he thought, "you will soon awaken to appreciate the punishment that falls upon the man who dares to step between me and the child-wife I once loved so well, and rob me of her sweet gratitude, the sad substitute for the love I could not hope for. I'll give him one more chance. She may have repented. If she has only done so,

I will yet relent; but if she persists in her infatuation, there is but one course open to me, and I will not go back from my purpose."

He sat gazing into the fire, and as he sat and looked back into the past his heart grew hard; as he thought of the future he shuddered, but not for himself.

It was now an hour after midnight, and Sister Brigitte entered, brisk and wakeful, ready for her vigil through the long silent hours of the early morning.

"I hope I've not overslept myself, doctor?" she said, cheerfully.

"You're punctual as a clock, Sister Brigitte," replied Dr. Tholozan with an old fashioned bow.

"You look upon him as out of danger now, I think?" questioned the Sister, "is it not so?"

"Yes, Sister; thanks to his good constitution, and your careful nursing, he must recover."

"Under Providence!" added the Sister.

"Under Providence!" repeated Dr. Tholozan, mechanically. And then he lighted his candle-lamp, and walked straight to his wife's [illegible]. He opened her escritoire and took out her little red morocco diary. His hand shook as he opened it.

There was no further entry in the book. The lines he had read before he saw once more. They were blotted with the traces of tears, still wet, tears that had been shed within the last few hours.

Dr. Tholozan closed the book and replaced it. His hand no longer trembled. His lips were drawn tighty together, and his teeth were close set as he walked straight to his study. He opened a cabinet and took out a little stoppered bottle half full of white crystals; he weighed out a certain quantity, by means of a little pair of scales with glass trays. Then he tilted it into a phial of dark purple glass; he half filled the phial with clear liquid; he shook the phial until the crystals were dissolved; then he filled it up with a clear yellow syrup, which gave forth a pungent and aromatic odour. Again he shook the phial; he tasted the contents, and then he corked it. With unshaking hand he wrote upon an adhesive label the amount of the dose, with a direction that it was to be administered every four hours. Then he affixed the label in its place. He closed the cabinet, re-locked it, and walked straight to the sick man's room. He handed the purple phial to the Sister, simply remarking, "Let him take it regularly, Sister Brigitte," and he wished her goodnight.

Then Dr. Tholozan retired to bed; but it was a long time before sleep overtook him. Still, even murderers sleep, and this worse than murderer found troubled rest at last.

CHAPTER XIV.

TIME had rolled on. George Leigh was now convalescent; he was free from pain, and often sat in the big easy-chair by his bedroom fireside. For whole weeks Sister Brigitte had administered to him daily increasing doses of the mysterious medicament contained in the purple glass phial, and his bodily strength was gradually fast returning. But a terrible change had come over him; a discoloration, which had first manifested itself at the tips of his fingers, had extended over the whole surface of his body. It had shown itself at first when it spread to the face in a sort of ashen-grey colour. The tint had deepened, and day by day it seemed to become more intense. At first Sister Brigitte had been considerably alarmed; but she took heart of grace when Dr. Tholozan had told her that there was nothing to fear, nothing to be astonished at. The Sister naturally inferred from his observations that this gruesome effect was merely transient; she supposed then that it would disappear as rapidly as it

had supervened. But her anxiety returned as she noticed the daily increasing intensity of what had been at first only a dusky appearance, and its gradual development into a ghastly metallic blue colour.

The effect was terrible, and exaggerated by the victim's fair hair, moustache, and beard, which stood out in grotesque prominence, in frightful contrast to his darkened features. By the doctor's direction the sick man had been denied the use of a mirror, and though George Leigh was aware that a dreadful change had come over him he was unconscious of the extent of his own disfigurement. He saw no one now but Sister Brigitte and Dr. Tholozan and his wife, for Madame Pichon had gradually ceased her visits to the sick-room, as she noticed the horrible change that was coming over him day by day.

"Felix," she said to her cousin, "I can't bear to look upon him. I can't bear to think of him as he is now. Let me stay away, Felix, and treasure the remembrance of my lover as he was, and pray for his return to health. As he is he frightens me; and I cannot bear to look upon his face. My own conscience tells me that I am acting rightly in this thing. No woman is wise to wilfully expose herself to a disillusion; the disillusion will come, they say,

soon enough. Tell me, my dear friend, is it not better so?"

And so Madame Pichon, though she made a daily pilgrimage to her cousin's house, and was profuse in her presents of fruit and flowers, wisely avoided the presence of the sick man.

It had been part of the system adopted by the doctor to seclude his victim to the uttermost. Beyond those we have named, since the contents of the purple phial had been first administered, not a soul had set eyes upon George Leigh. Since the commencement of his horrible vengeance the doctor had been, if possible, more kind and affectionate in his demeanour to George. This the young fellow had not unnaturally put down as the result of his engagement to Madame Pichon. When that lady first absented herself, George Leigh had been astonished, but by no means uneasy. Indeed, truth to tell, it was a great relief to him. To propose to a woman one does not care a button for must be difficult. It is possible to conceive that a man should screw himself up to the required pitch when urged by powerful motives; but to keep up the comedy must be more difficult, and George had felt the strain almost beyond his strength. His feelings had considerably changed now, and the position had altered

altogether. When George Leigh had first done violence to his own feelings he had supposed himself to be on his deathbed, or at least that his recovery was extremely unlikely,—he had honestly thought that he was making a heroic sacrifice; but when he looked at the matter with a calmer mind it dawned upon him that he had merely, as it were, been guilty of a trick, a rather mean stratagem, in the interest of the woman he loved. Not that he faltered in his determination to carry out his self-immolation to the bitter end. He had chosen it as the only means of escape for Hélène, the only way of turning aside what he knew from her own lips were her husband's just suspicions. Sophie Pichon as Sigismonda had amused him; she had appeared to him intensely comic in the *rôle* of Niobe; but as Venus Victrix she annoyed and disgusted him, and became to his mind absolutely repellent. But, notwithstanding this, the young man had determined to go through with the thing, and had no intention whatever of breaking his plighted troth.

As the results of Dr. Tholozan's diabolical ingenuity became more and more apparent, George Leigh had noted them with wonder; the gradual discoloration of his hands had first annoyed, then irritated and alarmed him. Sister Brigitte was far

too well-trained a nurse to betray any astonishment; but she had been very much exercised indeed by a series of symptoms which she had never met before in all her large experience at the bedside. All she could extract from Dr. Tholozan was that the strange discoloration "was a complication, which was very interesting and curious." It never dawned for an instant, either upon the doctor's wife, the Sister, or her patient, that the terrible disfigurement could be anything but temporary, or that it had been produced by art. Sister Brigitte once had a very strong hint from the doctor upon the matter. "It would be as well," he had said, "not to let his mind dwell upon it; distract his attention as much as possible. Above all, don't let him see a mirror." Sister Brigitte had done as she was bid; like a well-trained nurse, she carried out her instructions to the very letter, and though her curiosity was considerably aroused she asked no more indiscreet questions. To make assurance doubly sure she removed the dressing-glass from the room. It seemed to her but natural that, under such painful circumstances, Madame Pichon should absent herself. It was very apparent to Sister Brigitte that from his rheumatic fever her patient was now absolutely convalescent: she marvelled considerably that the doctor persistently set

his face against the young man's leaving his bedroom. Possibly, she thought, the doctor fears a relapse; but he seemed to her to carry professional caution beyond its usual limits. The real fact was, that, once having embarked upon it, Dr. Tholozan never relented, but resolved to carry out his fiendish purpose to the uttermost, and thoroughly avenge himself upon his wife and the unfortunate wretch who had dared to love her. It was with this object that, with a ferocious cruelty, he insisted that his wife should sit with the sick man every afternoon, and that he turned a deaf ear to her protestations and remonstrances upon this subject. But even to Hélène he never breathed a syllable of the diabolical wickedness of his purpose, the permanent disfigurement of the man he had once loved almost as a son. He looked on with pleasure and satisfaction at his wife's palpable grief and horror as the terrible process went on; indeed, it was as meat and drink to him; and he waited with feverish anxiety for the moment, which was evidently fast approaching, when he should be able to announce to both of them that his vengeance was complete, and at last throw off the mask.

Day after day he looked at the little volume in his wife's escritoire, but all in vain; Hélène never

added another line to the record of her weakness. But he read the tortures that she suffered in her eyes, those sad, wistful eyes, that seemed to beg to him for mercy and implore his pity. Alas! the evidence of his young wife's grief only stimulated his fury, and rendered him the more implacable.

As has been said, Madame Tholozan, by her husband's direction, was in the habit of sitting with the patient and reading to him in the afternoons; it was generally a newspaper that Madame Tholozan read aloud. Their eyes seldom met, and since the short and fateful interview at which, unknown to either of them, Dr. Tholozan had assisted, strange to say, no word of love had ever passed their lips. The hurried mutual confession that these two poor young people had made had been almost involuntary, but it had been a relief to both. Each knew the other's secret, and that was enough for either. Alas! the sweet dalliance allowed to happier lovers was denied to them; neither of them ever referred for an instant to the indiscretion into which they had been betrayed. From a sort of sympathy in each other's misery, neither of them, as it were by tacit consent, ever mentioned the name of Sophie Pichon, or made the slightest reference to her; they both heard more than enough of Madame Pichon

when Dr. Tholozan was present. He was never tired of delivering little messages from his cousin to the invalid. It gave him a sort of feverish pleasure to compel the unfortunate young man to respond to the widow's raptures in Hélène's presence.

Madame Tholozan was seated by the invalid's bedside one afternoon, the paper on her lap. They were alone.

"I wonder when the doctor will let me go out?" said the young fellow wearily, "I seem to long for air. I must get away to some quiet place where I can pick up my strength. This strange symptom which has come upon me," and he looked at his hand, which showed up in startling contrast against the white coverings of the bed, "frightens me; it seems to increase rather than diminish. If it is as apparent in my face as it is in these hands of mine, I shall become a sort of terror to all I meet; for a time I may even have to go about veiled, a modern Mokanna. It's not a pleasant idea, Madame, by any means. Your husband treats me like a child," he added, dejectedly; "he might let me have a mirror. I am not surely so weak-minded as to be appalled at the sight of my own misery! Is it very apparent, Madame?"

"You're terribly changed, Monsieur Leigh,

Hélène answered, enigmatically; "but you're better in health, that is a great deal. There was a time when we all despaired of your recovery; all, save my husband: he was always sanguine as to the result."

"Sometimes I think, Madame, that it would have been better if Dr. Tholozan for once in his life had been wrong."

"You mustn't be despondent, Monsieur Leigh. We all have our trials; but we are bidden never to despair."

Her eyes were cast down upon the journal in her hand, and the pair lapsed for a while into silence, which was at length broken by the invalid.

"When I am well enough," he said, "I think I shall cross the Channel once more, and take a look at my relations. I have been working here in Paris so long that it is almost a duty; but I suppose I shall drift back here again after all. In fact, I must," he added with a sigh, as he thought of Madame Pichon and her splendid house in the Rue Monceau, and as he remembered the life he had condemned himself to lead for the sake of the woman who sat at his bedside. "It will do my old father and me both good," he said, "to look upon each other's faces once again." And he ran his dusky hand

meditatively over the short blond beard that he had allowed to grow during his illness.

Madame Tholozan shuddered at his words.

"Shall I read again to you, Monsieur Leigh?" she said, as she raised the newspaper to conceal her emotion.

"You are too good, Madame," he replied. And then she plunged into the *feuilleton* of that day's *Barbier.*

After a while the reading was interrupted by Dr. Tholozan's *bonne,* who first knocked discreetly, and then entered, bearing one of those big high-handled artificial-looking baskets of flowers which the florists have lately succeeded in making so fashionable in this country.

Fanchette held it out artistically for the invalid's inspection.

"Madame Pichon, monsieur," she said, addressing Leigh, "desired me to tell you that she has arranged this basket of flowers herself; she sends them to you with her best wishes and this little note."

She handed him a little letter redolent of tuberose.

"She also desired me to say, Madame," Fanchette continued, "that should Madame desire to see her,

she is at the present moment with Dr. Tholozan in his study."

"Fanchette," said Leigh, "give Madame Pichon my grateful thanks;" and he stared mechanically at the flowers, taking out a magnificent spray of scarlet geranium and laying it upon the bed. But he did not offer to open the little note, and Madame Tholozan sent no response to the widow's suggestion.

Fanchette curtseyed and left the room.

George Leigh still turned the great spray of geranium round critically between his fingers and thumb.

"You will pardon me, Monsieur Leigh," said Madame Tholozan, "but hadn't you better open the letter? It may call for a reply."

He broke the seal carelessly, and this was what he read:

"DEAREST GEORGE,—If you only knew what it costs me, George, to stay away from you, you would pity me. I do it under protest, and it is very hard to bear; but it is my cousin's wish, and of course his wishes are to me as laws. I cut the flowers in the little basket myself in the conservatory this morning; the arranging them has been quite a

labour of love. But I fear you won't be satisfied, for you artists are all so terribly critical, and so very difficult to please. Monsieur Laguerre, who introduced himself to me as a friend of yours, inquires most affectionately after you whenever we meet. He is such a nice fellow. How I envy Hélène! Don't flirt with her, George; but you'll find it very difficult to avoid that, I suppose. All these dreamy blondes are so terribly sentimental.

"Ever your own,

"Lovingly and *trustingly*,

"SOPHIE."

The artist laughed, and tossed the letter upon the coverlet impatiently.

"She is ingenious. She tells me that she cut the flowers herself this morning; this one, at all events, is gummed and wired." And he handed it to Madame Tholozan with a smile. "But we live in an artificial age,—perhaps they grow so nowadays in our Parisian conservatories. Who can tell?"

Meanwhile Madame Sophie Pichon was closeted with her cousin. The doctor was seated back in his easy-chair, gazing upon her with a smile of amusement.

"Felix," she said, in an anxious tone, "this

suspense is killing me. Is he so very much changed —changed for the worse, I mean? I ought to act deliberately in this matter. Do you think, Felix, that the disfigurement will be permanent? Be honest with me, dear friend; let me implore you to be honest. I could bear a great deal. I have forgiven him a great deal. Yes, I forgave his wicked philanderings with Hélène." The doctor gave a gesture of impatience. "You needn't shrug your shoulders like that, and look as if you could eat me; there *were* philanderings, and they were wicked, very wicked. They may have escaped you; but I could read it in their eyes. But, Felix," she added solemnly, "though there's nothing I wouldn't do for George, I couldn't marry a bronze statue."

"You shall know all in good time, Sophie," he replied.

"That's all very well," she said; "but in the meanwhile I am becoming compromised; our engagement has been more than hinted at in print. Besides," said she, with a blush, "were my marriage with George to become impossible, I might wish to make other arrangements."

"Of a matrimonial nature, Sophie?"

"Don't be indiscreet, Felix. Since poor Adolphe's death I have been without a natural protector. It

was all very well, you know, before your marriage; but since that time it has seemed to me that your own—ahem! troubles," she added, with a spiteful sniff, "have given you enough to do without being worried by mine. Felix," she continued, with importance, "I have received a great deal of attention since I left off my mourning."

"From George?" inquired the doctor, with a smile.

"From George and others," said Madame Pichon, as she cast down her eyes.

"And the aspirants, Sophie?"

"Their name is Legion, Dr. Tholozan," said the widow, with a little laugh.

"Come to the point, my dear," said the doctor, with a smile of amusement, as he leant back in his chair.

"You're terribly matter-of-fact, Felix," replied Madame Pichon. "You never spare my blushes."

"They become you, my dear; they become you, and I'm used to them," said the doctor.

"Cousin Felix," said Monsieur Pichon's widow, "Captain Laguerre, a Gascon gentleman of ancient lineage, made me a formal offer of his hand this morning. Captain Laguerre is a most distinguished officer; he wears the Cross of Valour, and has served

in two African campaigns; he has now retired from the army covered with glory. He is at present engaged in literature, in which his reputation is deservedly high."

"As a professional duellist," remarked the doctor, coolly; "in which character he draws a monthly salary from the *Barbier.*"

"No, Felix, no; Captain Laguerre is not what you would paint him; he is a noble man capable of many sacrifices. He even spared poor George's life for my sake. And, Felix, I—I love him."

"The gentleman you speak of, Sophie," replied the doctor, imperturbably, "is a dangerous man; he is a soldier of fortune, a professional swash-buckler. You'd better be careful, Sophie; don't go too far with him. It would be a ridiculous alliance to which I could never give my consent."

"Only tell me that George is not permanently disfigured, and I am satisfied. If you cannot tell me this, Cousin Felix, I shall marry Captain Laguerre."

"Then you must be mad indeed, Sophie Pichon. Once get into the clutches of a ruffian of his class, and you will be completely ruined. Were you fool enough to marry this fortune-hunter, he would first squander your fortune and then render your life miserable."

"You and my notary would take [illegible] fortune, my kind cousin. Heaven knows [illegible] on," that it is with regret and agony that [illegible] don my engagement with poor George. You [illegible] deny that there is no hope of his permanent recovery from his disfigurement."

The doctor shook his head.

"Then, Dr. Tholozan, I formally demand your consent to my marriage with that honourable gentleman, Captain Louis Laguerre."

"Pish!" replied the doctor.

"Is that all the answer you have to give me, Cousin Felix?"

The doctor repeated the interjection.

"Then, Felix," said the widow, in her most tragic tones, "we part as enemies. My notary, Dr. Tholozan, will serve you with the necessary *sommations;* this, Louis informs me, 'is the usual course under such circumstances, when the lady's guardian proves récalcitrant,' as he tersely puts it. My friend," she continued, "I bid you farewell. I forgive you, and I leave you in the hope that the time will come when you will think better of poor Sophie and her affianced husband. Will you be good enough to ring for my carriage?"

The doctor did as he was bid without further

remonstrance, and the ruffled widow swept indignantly from the room.

"And now the cat's out of the bag," thought Dr. Tholozan. "In a few days, thanks to my shallow cousin's tongue, the matter will be common talk; for she is certain to impart it to her military adorer, and he will sell the whole scandal to the *Barbier* at so much a line. I know already, though she has never breathed a word of it, that Hélène sees my hand in this thing. Will she ever forgive me? Will she ever confess to me in words that she has wronged me? Never; she is too proud of that. The hour of her chastisement approaches, and of his. The helpless old man has accomplished his vengeance upon his youthful rival and his faithless wife. Nothing now remains but to announce to them their punishment, their lifelong punishment, and my crime." He paled as these vindictive thoughts passed through his mind, and pressed both his hands convulsively to his chest.

"I'm not the man I was," said the doctor aloud.

CHAPTER XV.

"SISTER BRIGITTE, I felicitate you," said the doctor cheerfully, as he entered the invalid's room early in the afternoon on the day after the conversation with Madame Pichon narrated in the last chapter. "Our troubles are drawing to a close; and to your tender care our patient's convalescence is in a great measure due. And I congratulate you too, Leigh; it's a time for congratulation when a sick man leaves his bed for the first time. The getting up has fatigued you, I fear. Are you equal to giving me half an hour, Leigh?" he added, almost tenderly. "Don't over exert yourself; but I should like half an hour's talk with you if you feel up to it."

"I think so, doctor. I am a little weak, a trifle dazed and giddy; but it is passing off."

"Leave us then, Sister Brigitte," said the doctor, "and kindly tell Madame Tholozan that I await her here. It might be as well perhaps, Sister, if you seized the opportunity to take the air; for we have

a little business to transact, and it may occupy some time."

The Sister nodded her acquiescence, gave her patient a parting smile, and the doctor opened the door for her and bowed her out as if she had been a duchess. He closed the door again carefully, and then sat himself down opposite the artist, who reclined in the big winged arm-chair at the fireside.

"I have a good deal to say to you, Leigh," he began, quietly. "I have something to read to you, and something to announce. I'll begin with the announcement. Yesterday, my cousin, Madame Pichon, informed me that it was not her intention to loyally carry out her engagement with you."

The artist gave no sign of astonishment or anger; he simply nodded.

"I am probably right in thinking, Leigh," continued the doctor, "that this piece of news, which would have been a severe blow to most men, is no disappointment to you. You know very well that previous to your illness, previous to my marriage even, I had been glad indeed to perceive my cousin's marked partiality for you. I did everything in my power to forward her wishes; I even went so far as to urge with you the expediency of a marriage which would give you possession of immense wealth, and

probably be the best means of protecting Sophie against herself. But you were romantic; the accumulations of the late Monsieur Pichon had no attractions for you. Perfectly heartwhole, and perfectly indifferent, you did not respond to my infatuated cousin's manifest advances. Can I go on, my young friend, or do I weary you?"

"Pray go on, doctor," said the artist.

"This, then, was the position of things prior to my marriage—my hasty, rash, ill-considered marriage. I go away upon my little wedding tour with my newly married wife. Circumstances, over which you have no control, again throw you and Madame Pichon much together; although Sophie offers you every possible encouragement, you yet take no advantage of your position, remaining as unimpressionable as ever. That, I think, was the exact position of affairs?"

The artist nodded once more.

At that moment a gentle tap was heard at the door.

"Enter, my child, enter," said Dr. Tholozan, cheerfully.

Madame Tholozan, looking pale and haggard, came into the room. She quailed before her husband's

the place that had been so long a home to him with Sister Brigitte that very day. He never entered it again. Madame Pichon's grief was violent in the extreme; it did her a wonderful amount of credit in the eyes of her numerous acquaintances, and of the servants. There was no scandal. The Maire of the *arrondissement* came and viewed the body in a perfunctory manner. One of Dr. Tholozan's confrères gave a formal certificate that the deceased man had long suffered from disease of the heart, and that that was the cause of death.

Madame Pichon's grief for her cousin was in one sense sincere, for it necessitated the postponement of her marriage with Captain Louis Laguerre for a period of six months.

The doctor was buried at Père-la-chaise, and quite a large procession followed his body to the tomb. There was no religious ceremony, for the will of the deceased specially forbade it; but the scientific world was in great force at the grave. There were no less than three orations. The lecturer on Forensic Medicine to the great medical school of which Dr. Tholozan had been a distinguished member spoke first, and fulsomely praised the deceased for fully ten minutes. Then an old colleague of the doctor's, a distinguished atheist, delivered a violent

tirade against religion. And lastly an eminent vivisector mourned the loss of one who had been, as he described him, a distinguished fellow-labourer in one of the least popular paths of science. And then the earth was rattled down on the coffin, and the distinguished crowd hurried home to dinner; and Dr. Tholozan was left to sleep in peace at Père-la-Chaise under the shadow cast by the great marble monument which had been erected by his disconsolate widow to that benefactor of the human race, Adolphe Pichon.

Madame Pichon was considerably disappointed at the simple headstone, which recorded her Cousin Felix's name and age, and nothing more; but the doctor was a man of method, and the directions for his burial were specified in his will. The will bore date six months before his death. By it he left his great house and everything he possessed in the world to his dear wife Hélène. And it is my desire," the instrument went on, "that, after a decent interval, my said wife Hélène Tholozan, *née* Montuy, shall contract the matrimonial alliance which I have recommended to her, and this recommendation," the will continued, "will explain to my dear and trusted friend, George Leigh, why I have left him no tangible token of my affection and esteem."

There were three people at least who could read the riddle the will contained.

Nor was Dr. Tholozan's grave uncared for and unvisited. A lovely woman clad in deepest black was a familiar figure to the *gardiens* at the cemetery. For Hélène had forgiven her dead husband; she had caught the last word he uttered with his dying breath; she had interpreted his cry for forgiveness as a reversal on his part of the unjust sentence he had pronounced upon her. She read the one little word, in the fulness of her own forgiving, loving, trusting heart, as the confession of the death repentance of the man who had meant her well, but who, under a mistaken impression of her infidelity, had at a single blow wrecked the life of an innocent man. And so she made her weekly pilgrimage to the lonely grave of her dead husband, and sat there and wept genuine tears of sorrow; and still remembered him only as her kind guardian and her benefactor.

But we must not lose sight of Monsieur Pichon's widow. Deprived of the protection of her astute counsellor and trustee her cousin, she rushed upon her fate. She married Captain Louis Laguerre, that distinguished Gascon officer, and then a sort of blight came upon her. His notorious infidelities rendered her furiously jealous, and she was only too ready to

retort upon her faithless husband in kind. But the Captain's terrible reputation with the pistol and the small sword kept her many admirers at a most respectful distance. As Dr. Tholozan had predicted, her vast fortune was rapidly dissipated by her husband, who was a notorious gambler. Madame Laguerre, still a faded but handsome woman, is a well-known figure at the Casino at Monte Carlo.

Sister Brigitte still lives on, the trusted companion of the physician's widow. She does not say much, but she ponders a good deal over the awful drama in which she involuntarily assisted in the doctor's house. As her thoughts go back to that terrible time, she is sometimes inclined to think that she has penetrated the mystery of the purple phial. But though Sister Brigitte has quitted the religious garb, those who have the privilege of her acquaintance always address her as Sister; and she is still discretion itself, and yet finds consolation in doing little acts of kindness by stealth, and in the frequent perusal of her favourite work, "The Lives of the Saints."

CHAPTER XVI.

It was opening day at the Royal Academy of Arts. Two young men had just left the dense crowd that pushed and hustled in front of one of the pictures of the year. They must have been Art students, for both smelt of tobacco, both wore velvet coats, both talked loudly and authoritatively, and both of them looked as if their hair wanted cutting very badly indeed.

"I tell you the knee's out of drawing," said one of them.

"Not a bit of it, my dear boy," replied the other; "the old leper, though eccentric, is always correct. He wouldn't be hung where he is, and sell as he does, if he wasn't."

"Lucky devil," remarked his companion. "I wonder if he really is a leper?" he continued.

"Oh yes, not a doubt of it, you know; horrible case,—born so, I fancy. Been dying of it for years, only one eye left, they say; never sees a soul, and has his food passed to him through a trap-door.

Beastly thing for him, of course. Mysterious affair, you know,—large family all lepers."

"Then I don't know that he is so very lucky after all. By Jove, I shouldn't care to change places with him."

And the young gentlemen turned to another picture.

Nobody knew very much about Mr. Leigh, the successful artist. There was his address in the Academy Catalogue, Le Vieux Château, near Etaples, France. That was all.

As a rule, things do not lose by the telling: roll your snowball long enough, as long as there is plenty of snow, and there is no limit to its increase. The fact that no one ever looked on George Leigh's face, that he led a secluded life, and that his many friends had lost sight of him, had caused the leper story to be originated, and now everybody believed it; and George Leigh, who had scored his first success at the Paris Salon in "Phryne before the Tribunal," was almost universally spoken of in Art circles as Leigh the Leper.

Several years had gone by since the incidents described in the last chapter. We remember how Dr. Tholozan had solemnly pronounced his unjust sentence of banishment from the society of the rest

of the human race upon George Leigh. He had condemned him to be a pariah and an outcast; he had, as it were, set a mark, worse than the mark of Cain, upon him. The unfortunate man, like Cain, had fled from the scene of his punishment; he had become a fugitive, but not a wanderer. Much had happened in those years. In his mind's eye the artist ran over all the out-of-the-way places he could think of to seek a suitable spot in which he might bury himself alive. But before he came to this terrible determination, he visited several of the principal physicians of Paris; he told his story, his pitiful story, as far as it was necessary to tell it. The wise men, one and all, gave their heads a melancholy shake, and unanimously told the unhappy man that science could do nothing for him; the dead man's vengeance had been complete.

And then it was that George Leigh bethought himself of Etaples and the old Château. He remembered that he had once peeped through a great iron *grille,* which formed the entrance to the place, with curiosity; he recollected how a notice board on the grey stone wall of the gateway had announced that the place was to let, how he had pealed away at the great bell which clanked from its iron cage; he remembered how a little girl had admitted him, and

how her father, who was in charge of the place, showed him over it. It was certainly the most solitary spot, and at the same time the most lovely, that he had ever seen. He had passed a whole day there, he had made half-a-dozen sketches, and he had reluctantly torn himself away when light failed him. "If the old Château near Etaples is still to let," thought he, "that is the very place for me to live and die in." It was to let, and its owner was only too glad to find a tenant in the English artist. George Leigh had never failed to sell his works, and by means of "Phryne before the Tribunal" he had leapt at once into celebrity; and as long as his eye and hand did not fail him, he was certain of a large income.

When Leigh had first seen the place it was in a very bad state of repair. It had been the favourite toy of a wealthy man who had died before he could put the finishing touch to the earthly Paradise he meant to end his days in. There were big conservatories tumbling into ruin, a huge vinery which had not been heated for years, a vast courtyard containing stabling and coach-houses, a great walled fruit-garden; at one end there were melon pits, a ruined fernery, and even a labyrinth; and the whole was surrounded by a stone wall eight feet high.

The place contained about eleven acres, and it was looked after by a single man. At least three-fourths of the ground was filled by a magnificent forest of trees; and a dense jungle of ferns, ivy, and briars grew in wild profusion at their feet. What had once been clean-shaven lawns were now covered with coarse thick grass; broad walks green with moss wound about amongst the trees in every direction. The entire estate formed a natural basin, through the bottom of which ran a babbling stream; by an artful arrangement of flood-gates a miniature lake had been formed in the centre; it had once been well stocked with fish, but when Leigh took the place it was full of weeds and water-lilies; very picturesque but terribly unwholesome, and alive with eels. A boat lay rotting in a little thatched boating-house, and told of neglect and decay. So numerous were the paths that ran through the bosky recesses of the enchanted dell that a strong man might tire himself out there in a single day, and yet never traverse the same road a second time. Rabbits started up from under your feet in every direction, and the place had become a sort of haven of refuge for the game in the neighbourhood. The poacher had been pretty well stamped out in this part of France, and the whole district was strictly preserved. The dove

and the wood-pigeon cooed in the great trees, and there were squirrels innumerable who leaped from bough to bough. Such were the grounds.

As for the Château itself, the rooms had looked cold and comfortless enough with their yawning fireplaces and empty hearths. The once gay papers hung dropping with age upon the walls of the rooms. The house was dry enough, for it was built high upon one side of the ravine, and stood upon a sort of pedestal formed by the cellarage, which was built above ground. A Frenchman when he builds a house always provides enormous store room for his wine and wood. There was a big boudoir with a bow-window, which looked out upon a wilderness which had been once an ornamental garden; the shrubs had grown into great trees there, and flourished in wild luxuriance, unpruned and untended. The mild winters had failed to kill the fuchsias and geraniums; other flowers there were none save a few single marigolds, which the Robinson Crusoe left in charge of the place allowed to run wild there for the flavouring of his soup. The fellow even tethered his cow on what once had been the private lawn of the châtelaine of the place. There were other flowers, but they grew upon great trees,—they were not rose bushes, the old overgrown

standards were literally trees, and they were tenderly cared for by the hard-working old fellow in charge. The roses were his perquisites; he made rather a good thing out of them, and it was the only thing he was not compelled to give an account of. The hay, the fruit and vegetables, the dropped wood, even the eels in the lake, were regularly sent to market for the benefit of the proprietor. But the hard-working gardener and his little daughter got the benefit of the roses, and the trees, though very old, were cared for with a loving hand.

There were beauty, desolation, and solitude in the old Château when George Leigh first took it. He was a prudent man, and he got a long lease, and then he set about getting rid of the desolation as soon as possible. He was an artist, but he was also an Englishman, so he laid no impious hand upon the dreamy recesses of the bosky dells, but he went to work at once upon the innumerable paths. When he was not painting in the vast studio that he constructed at the back of the house, he was superintending the metalling of these paths, or rather little roads, for the principal ones were big enough to drive a pony carriage on. This work occupied him for an entire year. In the meantime he went on painting with his customary rapidity, and like a wise

man he put himself entirely in the hands of Monsieur Israels. He got through an enormous amount of work, and when we confess that Monsieur Israels was satisfied, we may be quite sure that the artist was on the high road to wealth; for Israels was an honest fellow in his way, and he dealt fairly enough with those who trusted him.

But George Leigh never set foot outside the high stone wall that surrounded his eleven acres.

The first year of Leigh's occupation of the Château had passed away. As soon as spring had commenced in earnest Leigh caused the flood-gates of the little lake to be opened, and he emptied the lake and made a clean sweep of the eels. And then an army of workpeople came over from Banquerouteville, and in a year the old Château was entirely renovated and redecorated. The workpeople never saw their employer, for Leigh never left his studio, where he toiled like a horse, till they were all safely off the premises at sunset. And then he went round with the man who had once been the gardener, but who was now raised to the position of general factotum, and the way in which George found fault with everything was something terrible. We remember how it had been a labour of love with him when he had assisted in the adornment of

Madame Tholozan's boudoir. As a rule, artists are men of expensive tastes, but Leigh went beyond that now; he was lavish, he was even wickedly extravagant. No doubt Monsieur Israels must have made something very handsome out of all the beautiful things that he sent down from Paris; but his instructions were always the same—"Spare no expense." Monsieur Israels carried out his orders to the very letter.

The fact is, that George Leigh, though a pariah under sentence of perpetual banishment, was about to marry the woman he loved, the only woman he had ever cared for, the woman for whom, in one sense, his life had been wrecked. That woman had consented to be the companion of his solitude. She in her peerless beauty—for the haggard look had now left Hélène's face—had promised to be his wife; she was about to marry the man who for her sake shunned every human eye but hers; she had consented to share his solitude, for in her eyes George was still the same. Their love had passed through the fiery furnace of tribulation, and it still remained what it had ever been—pure and unsullied, unalloyed by a single sensual thought.

The workmen had completed their task. George Leigh was standing at the big bow-window of the

boudoir of the old Château looking out upon the sunny garden with its closely shaven lawn, and he smiled upon the big parterres, where choice flowers in a profusion of varied colours blazed in rich luxuriance; the air was heavy with their fragrance. Then he took a photograph from his breast and kissed it. It was the same photograph that Dr. Tholozan had given him three years ago.

"Now my new life commences," he said. "I have had my punishment. God knows we both have suffered. And to-morrow she will be here, she will be mine at last, and nothing will ever come between us, not even the remembrance of my old friend's vengeance." And then he stepped out into the sunlit garden.

"How slowly the hours pass," he thought.

* * * * * *

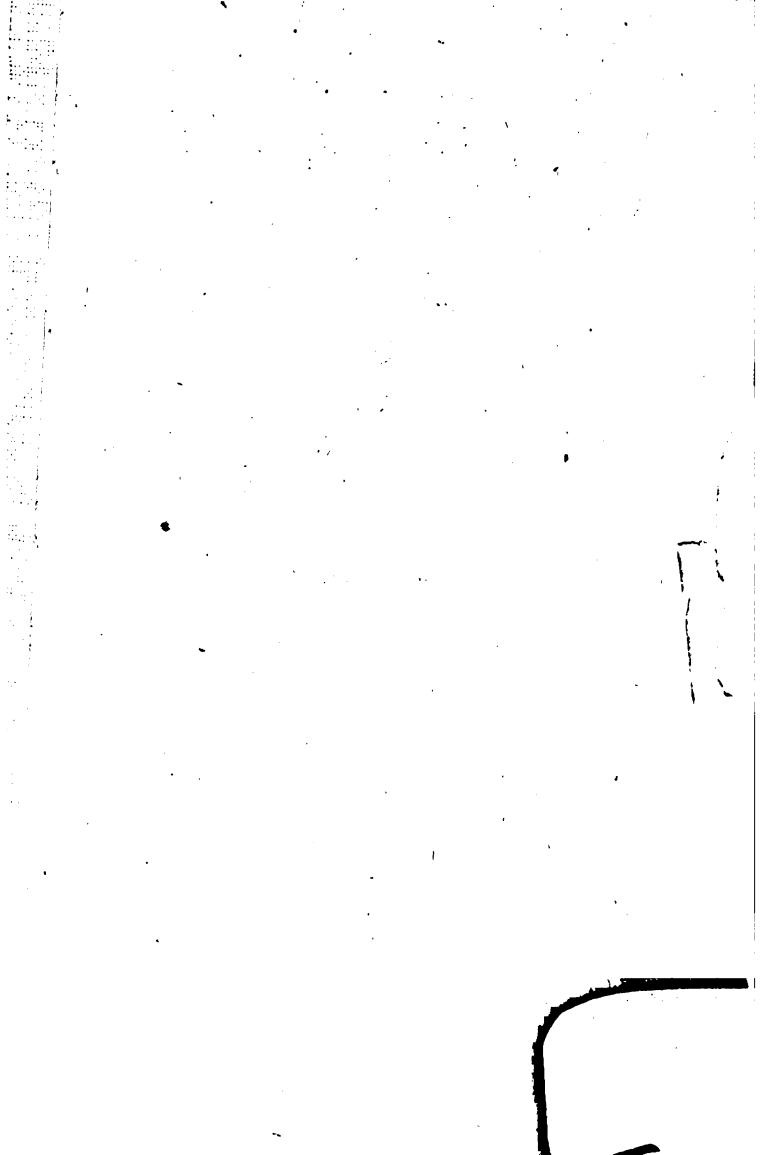
The Leighs are terribly unsocial people; they have given a great deal of offence in the neighbourhood by declining all civilities. The leper story is thoroughly current at Etaples; but the curé of the parish smiles at it, and speaks well of the English heretic and his wife. He never asks their charity in vain for his little flock, and once a week a cover is laid for him at the old Château. His little church has become quite a show place since the foreign

artist presented him with the altar-piece of the Virgin and Child, before which the peasantry kneel and pray, and which stray tourists from Banque-routeville gaze at with curiosity and admiration. The painting of that altar-piece was a labour of love to the artist. It was his first religious picture, and the figures are portraits. George Leigh is not the only painter who has been privileged to reproduce the features of the woman he loves as the type of the good, the pure, and the beautiful. When Monsieur Israels came down on business he tried hard for a *replica* of the altar-piece, but George declined his tempting offers.

It is easy enough to recognise his second model in the sturdy little fellow who, clasping his mother's hand, toddles at her side. Strange to say, they call the boy Felix, for both of them have long ago forgiven the man who was once George Leigh's old friend. The future lies smiling before them; the dark clouds which once overshadowed their lives have passed away. Their sufferings have been great, and who shall grudge them the long dream of love that lies before them in the sunny leafy paradise of the old Château?

THE END.

P.H.



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